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COACH AND BUS WEEK Wednesday May 17, 2006 **Issue 730** £2.50

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COACH AND BUS WEEK
is published by Rouncy Media, First Floor, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

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Full annual subscription rate for 51 issues: UK £69, Europe/Eire £115, USA and rest of the world £140

www.cbwnet.co.uk

ISSN: 1351-3877

Printed by: William Gibbons & Sons

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The joys of the TXI

After a terrible journey south to London aboard a 'fast' GNER service which stopped dead for 90 minutes at St Neots, coming back from Kings Cross was little better.

To be fair to GNER, the 23.30 left and arrived on time, but at Peterborough Station, the dire assembly of cabs clattering outside promised an end to whatever luxury had gone before. Is it just me, or are TXI taxis the least sophisticated vehicles on earth next to Russian tractors?

With every gear in the diff groaning and every drain cover sending a jolt through my spine, within three miles I felt as if I'd just been on a particularly cheap fairground ride. And talking of taxis, what is that smell?

You can gather that I don't think much of most black cabs. If the current vogue for frequent and on-demand services using O-licensed MPVs continues, maybe I'll have to use fewer of them in the future.

As you'll read in this issue, Royal Bank of Scotland staff have a new dedicated 'taxi' service which is free-to-board, but Scottish Citylink have taken the concept a stage further with a seven-seater service to the international airport - nominally said to be in Glasgow - which is a combination of bus service and ring-and-ride.

Of course, there's nothing new in the concept, though its most notable proponent, Excellent Connections, has fought a running battle with traffic commissioners, the transport tribunal and with the massed voices of the taxi companies to get the principle of 'small buses' established.

Throughout the 10 years of this saga of what can and cannot be operated on an O-licence, attention has been focussed on local authority licensing, taxi companies, airport authorities, bus operators' licences and the statute book, with passengers seeming to be the last consideration.

Speaking entirely for myself, I will patronise any service which uses near-new, leather-seated, air conditioned vehicles which have pneumatic tyres and suspension, some form of soundproofing and have yet to acquire the tinge of burnt onions and urine. And I won't give a monkeys which licence is in use, as long as the insurance is still valid.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

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VOSA head comes under fire

Huge backlog at test centres claim operators

Stephen Tetlow, the chief executive of the Vehicle Operators Service Agency, has come under fire for allowing test centres to become bogged down.

Speaking at a Confederation of Passenger Transport dinner in London, Mr Tetlow told London and Home Counties operators that the average wait for annual tests is 18 days. But during a forum afterwards, several operators said some test stations were not even offering a booking for two weeks, and typical lead times are five weeks or more.

One complained that Royston testing station wouldn't let him submit vehicles for voluntary test, while another had been told by another station that he'd have to call back in a fortnight to book a test, then when he did in early May, gave him a date of June 24.

"Your information is not coming from operators, but from test stations, and they are telling you what you want to hear," said one operator. Mr Tetlow argued that the audit is, in fact, done independently by polling organisation MORI, and is an average for the whole of the UK.

In his opening address, Mr Tetlow told operators that VOSA has an agenda of modernisation: "We are modernising the way you interact with us," he said. "There is also a big environmental agenda which is starting to hit your business and our enforcement techniques.

"It is important we have this kind of dialogue. This is a £180 million business, and you pay my wages."

Mr Tetlow said targeting of operators was improving all the time via hand-held roadside computers which can download the operators' records: "We can improve targeting by 700%," he claimed.

Regarding test stations, he said the price hikes of fees in the last three years had allowed VOSA to invest £11m last year and a further £10m this year. Cost-cutting measures had included 260 job cuts.

He admitted the agency has ongoing problems with software, including the national booking system and the development of on-line bus service registration: "I cannot give you a date for that. We have problems with the file sizes, but we hope we can be on-line by the end of the year," he said.

Tetlow: annual test average is 18 days

Mr Tetlow was adamant that an article in the trade press which suggested he would axe traffic commissioners was "completely spurious." He said: "Quite frankly it was untrue. I'd be off my rocker to say that. Before I said it I would have to have a good plan for their replacement."

He said that the relationship between VOSA and the traffic commissioners is changing, in that VOSA is taking over much of the paperwork such as licence applications, which are to be centralised in Leeds.

Have you had problems booking annual tests? *CBW* is investigating the system to see what Stephen Tetlow's 18-day average actually means. Please write or call in confidence to andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk, 01733 293244

DfT gets defensive over criticism

The DfT has defended itself against the harsh criticism contained in the Transport Select Committee's annual report, although it refrains from answering the points specifically.

As reported last week, the committee, chaired by formidable Labour MP Gwyneth Dunwoody, called the department "sluggish" and "muddled" and said "inspirational leadership is needed at official level, but appears lacking."

In a statement to *CBW*, the DfT says: "The department does not accept this view and is delivering. Road casualties are down since records began and we have a road network that is as safe as anywhere in the world. We have the fastest growing railways in Europe and reliability is at its best for five years with nine out of 10 trains running on time. On our roads we are investing in the network, including managing existing roads better and adding capacity where necessary. There have been 36 major road schemes since 2001 with hundreds of smaller schemes to tackle congestion and improve safety. This is in addition to record levels of investment. By 2008 transport spending, even after inflation, will be 60% higher than 1997, reversing decades of under-funding."

Another new England coach...

Superstars like Robbie Williams, Gordon Ramsay, Boris Becker, Diego Maradona, Brian Lara and Paul Gascoigne will all soon be travelling in the lap of luxury, courtesy of National Express. The stars have agreed to take part in a series of televised football matches in the run up to the World Cup, called Soccer Aid. National Express has supplied two brand new specially-liveried Salvador Caetano Levantes to ferry the two teams, England and the Rest of the World, captained by Robbie Williams and Gordon Ramsay respectively, to and from the games. The final, played at Manchester United's Old Trafford ground, will be shown on Saturday May 27. The 49-seat coaches have been fully kitted out with CCTV, reclining leather seats and four dedicated drivers as well as on the ground support staff, DVD player and microwave. The series is in aid of UNICEF.

***CBW* has obtained the first artist's impressions of First Group's new global headquarters building planned for Aberdeen. The 12-acre complex also includes the depot of the local operating company, First Aberdeen. The proposed development has come up against much local opposition in the city with residents complaining about the development of a greenfield site and the potential congestion. Despite threatening to look elsewhere, First Group has pressed ahead with the project and has made some alterations to head off some of the criticism. The building has been turned through 90 degrees so that the nearest houses now face the front of the headquarters rather than the side as was originally planned. The office space is "married" to the bus depot by means of glass bridgeway that will link both buildings. The original application for Woodside was called in by the Scottish Executive and will be subject to a Public Inquiry that could be held in September.**

A first for First

New Secretary of State for Transport Douglas Alexander's first public engagement was in York, to check out First's new ftr service for himself.

The innovative bus/tram was the pet project of the previous Secretary of State Alistair Darling, who was originally invited to launch ftr until a cabinet reshuffle, just a few days beforehand, intervened.

Despite the well-publicised problems affecting the service in its first week, Alexander said he was impressed by the ftr after taking a short journey, although he used the occasion primarily to flesh out the government's proposed road user charging scheme.

On ftr he said: "It completely challenges the usual perception of what to expect when you take a bus. It is an excellent example of what can be achieved when a local authority and the bus industry work together to deliver better services for local passengers."

The first week of the service was effectively written off by First Group with a variety of problems disrupting the service. Particular difficulties were caused by the new ticket machines. Despite using on-board 'hosts', passenger confusion over how to use the machines, and a new fare regime, meant significant delays at stops, and caused bunching along the route. Electrical problems on some vehicles also caused delays.

Batting away the criticism, Alexander said: "I thought it was a good experience. Of course, there are always going to be teething problems with the introduction of a new scheme, but I think one needs to have a clear sense of the possibilities that innovations can bring to a community such as this."

On road user charging, Alexander said: "I am making clear that a personal priority will be to advance the debate about a national system of road pricing in this country, moving the debate from 'why' to 'how' we might make a national system in practice," before announcing a £10m fund for the development of a road user charging scheme.

Alexander: ftr challenges the usual perception

Conservative shadow transport secretary Chris Grayling responded to Alexander's speech, saying: "It is time ministers realised we need action now to improve transport and not vague ideas for the distant future. They could start by keeping some of the transport promises they've made in the last few years and then quietly dropped."

FirstGroup says a lot of the problems with the new ftr are down to lack of testing, stressing that York is a pilot scheme. A spokesman admitted to *CBW* that a lack of driver experience was compounding the problems. The next scheme is due to start in Leeds by the end of this year, but insiders say it is highly unlikely that the scheme will be up and running before then.

■ See page 29 for *CBW*'s look at ftr technology.

Briefly

New statistics from the DfT show that total traffic in the first quarter of 2006 was an estimated 1.2% higher than in Q1 2005. The DfT has also published a revised timetable for the implementation of the Traffic Management Act 2004 regulations. The civil bus lane and moving traffic enforcement regulations will come into force from early 2008.

Mayor of London Ken Livingstone announced last week that bus fares in the capital will rise by 10% next year, and that the congestion charge could increase to £10 per day in 2008. He revealed that 400 out of the 300,000 under-16s who have taken up TfL's free travel offer have had their passes confiscated for bad behaviour. The Mayor also announced free fares for under-18s in fulltime education, starting this September.

In what is being seen as a step towards a national smartcard scheme, the DfT and TfL last week announced the roll-out of Oyster card readers to all 310 over-ground railway stations in London. The readers should come on-stream in 2008. The equipment is also being upgraded to accept other kinds of smartcards, like ITSO.

Last week's cover photograph of First's ftr should have credited student Adam Johnson, the winner of a First Group competition to design a livery for the ftr. Mr Johnson, 21, is studying graphic design at Leeds Metropolitan University. His design is based on the First York network diagram.

BUSES

Traffic warden madness!

Now angry operator to sue county council

Traffic warden madness appears rife in High Wycombe following two incidents concerning Carousel Buses last week.

A driver on his tea break was given a ticket for stopping in a bus bay in Westbourne Street. The parking enforcement officials had, overnight, suspended all bays in the area for white and yellow line repainting in the area, yet had been using the bay in question for parking the contractor's vehicles while they were on their own tea breaks. As the bay was empty, Carousel's driver parked in it and slipped off for his tea break. On his return he saw the officials waiting to take down the restriction signs, but they waited until the warden had written out the ticket and placed it on the vehicle before removing the sign. In placing the ticket on the windscreen the female warden broke the windscreen wiper.

The incident was followed the next day when a driver noticed a warning light on the dashboard of his Mercedes-Benz Citaro and pulled up outside the depot for the fitters to investigate. As they crossed the road the driver attempted to restart the vehicle and couldn't. He suspected the engine cover may not have been properly closed and walked to the back of the bus to close it and retry the starting procedure.

The bus started straight away, but he found a warden blocking his path who refused to move and he issued a ticket. He also broke the windscreen wiper arm in the process.

Carousel owner Steve Burns was incensed by the "lunacy and petty-minded antics" - both incidents being recorded by the vehicles' CCTV systems. He said of the first incident: "You could see the word 'Bus' written in front of the bus in the bay. They took the signs down two minutes later. They were still cutting the signs down when the driver returned to the bus. They haven't even re-marked any of the bays - it is so frustrating.

"My driver could not see what the problem was. Parking attendants were standing there having a cup of tea when he parked. They could have come across and said something, but instead they waited until he'd gone and wrote out the ticket.

"We've become prime targets because we have to park outside our garages to change drivers. They've taken away all our parking spaces in town. We used to have four, but now we are down to just one."

Buckinghamshire County Council says it is not targeting Carousel Buses and argues it has made a lot of concessions and provided the operator with bus stands at short notice. They suggest Mr Burns write to them via their official complaints department.

Mr Burns says he will sue for the damage to the vehicles.

No parking? You can't be serious...

TransDev transformation on popular Bournemouth routes

The future's yellow as TransDev rings the changes down south

Following a period of evaluation since its acquisition of Bournemouth Transport, TransDev has agreed a policy for revitalising and improving Yellow Buses operation in the town - its first major shake-up in 103 years.

Managing director Derek Lott, and his new team, have undertaken reliability and punctuality studies, a timing point study (said to be unique in the deregulated bus operating environment) and a review of passenger boarding data. Consultation with focus groups, customers and Yellow Buses' staff have also been conducted.

Based on its conclusions, TransDev aims to create a core network of lowfloor, high-frequency services with a simplified fare system, improved services to the main hubs of the university and hospital, and a simple, easy to understand network.

Confusion over fares has indicated the need for simplicity and a new structure of cash payment and season tickets will be introduced to speed up boarding times and aid reliability and punctuality. Bus and route numbers are also to be simplified for greater clarity and understanding. Bus numbers will be colour-coded to match new network maps.

The new coloured network map forms part of a marketing push and will be introduced alongside new bus stop flags and a completely revised and updated website.

Customer feedback indicated a strong preference for lowfloor buses and at least 82% of customers will be served by them across the network.

It is planned that more of them will be introduced to the network some time in the New Year.

Phew! What a scorcher...

British passengers travel 375 million miles per year – equivalent to four trips to the sun – according to research conducted for infrastructure specialist Trueform. The survey reveals every person in Britain travels 8.1 miles per week by bus – or 421 miles per person per year. Britons use the bus on average 2.3 times per week. Londoners were the heaviest bus users with those polled claiming an average 5.5 journeys per week and travelling an average of 15.5 miles.

Southern Vectis under fire

Route changes designed to reduce dependence on Isle of Wight Council subsidised services in the village of Pan have proved unpopular with residents.

Commercial manager Mark Morgan Huws met with disgruntled residents at a public meeting in Downside Middle School, where he told them the single-deck 39 service previously running through their estate was a subsidised service and could not run during the evenings and at weekends.

The No 8 double deck service between Sandown and Newport had been re-routed since April 2 to provide extended services and allow Pan benefit from the commercially operated route. He claimed Pan was too close to Newport to allow it to have its own viable services.

Residents said they were unhappy at the use of double deckers on the service and felt it raised concerns about road safety, loss of street parking, damage to roads and increased pollution.

Mr Morgan Huws said double deckers were a necessity because of the capacity required – particularly between 07:30 and 09:00hrs. Because the route also served Sandown High School, buses perhaps didn't look full when passing through Pan but were heavily loaded at other points along the route.

Residents still maintained they wanted fewer and smaller buses passing through their estate. They were critical of both Southern Vectis and IoW Council for not consulting with them.

£446k Kickstart boost for Arriva service

Arriva's 263 service linking Altrincham and Manchester has been boosted by Kickstart funding of £446,425.

The funding has allowed the service to offer increased frequency, running every 12 minutes during weekdays and half-hourly schedules during the evenings, on Bank Holidays and on Sundays. Evening and Sunday running had previously been unavailable.

Arriva carried out a strong marketing campaign ahead of the re-launch on all residents along the route. Some 17,000 were targeted by a leaflet drop and given £1 discount vouchers.

Both Arriva and Greater Manchester PTA collaborated on the project, with the operator guaranteeing to provide modern lowfloor vehicles.

GMPTA believes the frequency and reliability of the service will entice more passengers to take advantage of the 263 to access Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Manchester, while avoiding the problems of finding parking spaces and, at the same time, contributing toward reducing congestion.

It is believed the funding support for this project will be the final allocation for this year and any other schemes not already assured of specific payments will be placed on hold.

Recent schemes funded by Kickstart include the introduction of high-frequency branded lowfloor bus operation in Gainsborough - supported by attractive ticketing initiatives - and the extension of the InterConnect services.

These, initially negotiated last year, jointly by Yorkshire Traction subsidiary Lincolnshire Roadcar and Lincolnshire County Council, have now come into operation between the council and Stagecoach Lincolnshire, following the group's acquisition of Yorkshire Traction. Jointly, the schemes were awarded £1m from Kickstart.

North Sheffield service

Sheffield City Council and South Yorkshire PTE are submitting plans to improve bus services in North Sheffield following a detailed consultation with local residents and bus passengers.

Plans are aimed at providing quicker journey times, greater reliability, improved stops and improved travel information systems. They involve creating a 24-hour bus lane with dedicated priority, upgrading stops along the route, including real-time information, and the creation of a parking lay-by for residents along one part of Burngreave Road who have been unable to park anywhere but on the road itself.

Parking bays will also be built in front of the shops on Spital Hill, which will aid the flow of general traffic.

Needle stabbing in Glasgow

A 56-year-old female bus passenger in Glasgow has been left in a traumatised condition after being stabbed with a needle.

The woman claimed she felt a sharp pain in the buttocks and looked round to see three teenagers standing behind her with what appeared to be a syringe. Starthclyde police are currently investigating the incident which happened on May 9 aboard a No 9 service operated by First. The woman is currently awaiting the results of medical tests.

Briefly

Johnson Bros Tours of Worksop vehicles always have trademark marker lights and air horns – but in our In Service Report last week, we failed to spot this tell-tale feature of Grettons' Van Hool. Sorry for saying the vehicle came from Johnsons of Henley-in-Arden, and thanks to Lee at the 'right' Johnsons for pointing out this error with typical good humour.

Investment in support of bus services in Cardiff will be revealed at the end of this month. Delegates at the ALBUM Conference were given a preview of the planned scheme and shown one of the exciting new buses – however, the details are currently under an embargo until 24 May when the scheme goes live. The new vehicles and services will be operated by Cardiff City Transport and are aimed at dramatically raising the profile of bus travel in and around the city.

More CCTV cameras are to fitted aboard school buses in Gloucestershire in a bid to combat bullying and bad behaviour.

Four buses operating in Stroud Valley were equipped with CCTV last year after it was discovered bad behaviour had contributed to or caused accidents.

A further three vehicles are now to be fitted with CCTV for use on routes around Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve.

Scania insists that manufacturers claiming Selective Catalytic Reduction exhaust aftertreatment is 'future proof' are mistaken. Spokesman Lars Linden told delegates at this year's Album Conference (see pages 33-35) that although the proposed emissions levels for 2012 had not yet been confirmed Scania was adamant they could not be achieved by using the SCR process. Scania believes the way forward lies in the use of ethanol or biofuels employed in more traditional powertrains.

COACHES

Drivers' hours will hit extended operation

Complicated new rules on rest breaks will push costs higher and damage our business, say operators

The new driving hours rules which start in April next year will push the cost of coach holidays higher and damage the quality of the product, say worried operators.

From April 11, changes to weekly rest will demand at least one 45-hour break every two weeks and at least one other weekly rest not less than 24 hours, but compensation for reduced weekly rest must be attached to another rest period of at least nine hours, and taken before the end of the third week.

A maximum 144 working hours can elapse between the end of one weekly rest and the beginning of the next.

The Confederation of Passenger Transport says that though it fought the changes and got some success, the outcome has been driven issues in the haulage industry.

"We are disappointed it is such a poor fit for the coach industry," said a CPT spokesman. "We don't think it's appropriate to have the same hours for PSV drivers, and suspect this change is driven by simplicity, because anything else would be too complex for the enforcement agencies."

David Cattermole of Galloway European in Suffolk told *CBW* that the changes are unnecessary: "This legislation is not thought through, and not appropriate for this industry. Trade associations have tried to explain why, but this has fallen on deaf ears."

Mr Cattermole said the greatest disappointment is that there is no evidence at all that the current weekly rest rules have caused any safety problems. "There's not one shred of evidence that working 12 days on tour is unsafe," he said.

"Though the new rules will have minimal effect on our holiday operation, on our school tours we sometimes have drivers away for two or three tours back to back. It's a minefield. Before long we will need two drivers to drive one coach."

John Johnson, of Johnsons of Henley-in-Arden, said that although he has not looked in detail at the impact, the effect will be more cost. "So far I can't see anything to help the industry," he said. "At a time when extended tour operators are under pressure from low-cost airlines, those operators are set to get another kicking.

"And where's the driving force in this argument? Coach drivers have an excellent safety record, so what's this going to achieve?" he added.

FACT FILE

From April 11, 2007:

DRIVING TIME

- **Standard daily maximum 9 hours**
- **10 hours permissible twice per fixed week**
- **56-hour limit per fixed week**
- **Existing 90-hour limit remains for any two consecutive fixed weeks.**

BREAKS

- **45 minutes continuous break after up to 4.5 hours of driving, or 15 minutes followed by 30 minutes.**
- **New wording lays down that breaks must be used exclusively for recuperation. This may outlaw the practice of taking a break on a moving coach that someone else is driving.**

DAILY REST

- **Regular daily rest: 11 hours**
- **Reduced daily rest: 9 hours (up to three times between weekly rests, no compensation needed)**
- **Split daily rest: at least 3 hours plus at least 9 hours, with the 3 hour period coming first.**

SPREADOVER

- **Derived from daily rest requirements (as now), so the standard spreadover will be 13 hours (24-11) but this can be extended to 15 hours three times between weekly rests. It can be extended to 15 hours more than three times between weekly rests if the additional days contain a rest period of at least three hours.**
- **For multi-manned operations, the spreadover is 21 hours.**

WEEKLY REST

- **In any two consecutive weeks, a driver must take at least one uninterrupted 45 hour weekly rest and at least one other weekly rest, which may be reduced to as little as 24 hours (regardless of where it is taken).**
- **Compensation for reduced weekly rest must be given en bloc, and attached to another rest period of at least 9 hours, before the end of the third week following the week in which the reduction is taken.**
- **A maximum of 144 hours can elapse between the end of one weekly rest period and the beginning of the next one.**

Analysis courtesy of the Confederation of Passenger Transport

New service offers fast and hassle-free airport transfers for business travellers

Citylink seven-seaters challenge taxis

Scottish Citylink has launched an O-licensed, seven-seater service linking Glasgow hotels with Prestwick airport and the SECC.

Aimed at business travellers, the Hotel Hopair service tours hotels around Glasgow using stops, but also has a direct-line booking service for visitors to the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre and to Glasgow International Airport.

There are 48 departures weekdays, with fares of £5 single and £9 return, challenging taxis from the city. Services start at 05.00hrs and finish at 23.45hrs. There are 33 departures on Sundays.

Special phones have been installed at the City Inn, Menzies, Marriott, Jurys, Arthouse, Bewley and Thistle hotels, linking callers direct with Citylink. Bookings must be made an hour in advance.

"Glasgow Airport is a vital gateway for people visiting or leaving the city on business, which is why we were keen to launch a service to ensure they have a hassle-free, fast and inexpensive way to get to destinations," said Steve Walker, general manager at Scottish Citylink. "Depending on the success of this service there is every possibility we could roll it out to other busy airport locations across the country."

- AirportcarZ launches O-licensed eight-seaters for Edinburgh company - page 15

Gibraltar's coach tours fall to an all-time low

A row has broken out in Gibraltar over the disappearance of tourist coaches from the British territory. The 'Rock' has seen a slump of nearly 5,000 coaches since 2000, and was more than 1,000 coach arrivals down last year on 2004 figures. The blame has been laid variously at the door of coach operators and world events such as 9/11.

"The Government has failed to provide any solid argument to account for this slump, and continues to move from one self-serving excuse to another," said one commentator.

One theory offered was that coach operators in Andalusia were being put off by the cost of coach parking, and were depositing passengers at the border to continue on foot. But it has been revealed that, attracted by low fuel prices, most of those coaches then continue through customs to fill up and return to the border to wait for the passengers.

Tourism minister Joe Holliday has said that the fewer coaches there are on Gibraltar's congested roads, the better. "The value of tourism lies in the number of people, not the number of buses," he said.

Holliday was criticised for 'spinning' the visitor figures - 7.7 million people in 2005. The shadow minister for trade and industry, Dr Joseph Garcia, said that the rate of growth in tourism is a quarter what it was before the Government started spending money. "Mr Holliday has spent more money than ever before to achieve a lower rate of growth," he said.

Fraser Eagle has spread its wings since the days when it based its services on hiring operators for rail replacement

Fraser Eagle sponsors the 'Accy'

Fraser Eagle has become the official sponsor of local football club Accrington Stanley in a six-figure deal which sees its name go on to the stadium.

The Lancashire operator, which has spread its wings since running rail replacement, will continue to provide first and youth team travel for 'Accy' after a season in which the historic club gained promotion back into the Football League.

Padiham-based Fraser Eagle's name will go on to the shirts as well as the Fraser Eagle Stadium. "The relationship we have enjoyed with Fraser Eagle over the last 12 months has been fantastic," said the club's chief executive Rob Heys.

£50m-turnover Fraser Eagle remains the provider of the team mascot and sponsor of the Youth Education Programme.

Fraser Eagle has won a regional Age Positive Award for the North West in recognition of challenging ageism in the workplace. Fraser Eagle abolished the compulsory retirement age of 65 in 2005.

"All members of Fraser Eagle Group are recruited, selected and retained based not on age but on personal skills, attitudes and competence," said HR support manager, Fiona Croasdale.

Council weighs in for operators

Barnet Council has joined the wave of protest at Transport for London's Low Emissions Zone.

Barnet argues that unscrupulous operators will develop 'rat runs' through residential areas to avoid the 'insufficient' 45 enforcement cameras proposed, and says that although operators outside of London will be able to pick only Euro III vehicles for LEZ work, those inside London will be prejudiced.

The council argues that non-compliant vehicles are the mainstay of London schools services, and the LEZ will increase costs so dramatically that many operators will stop serving schools, with the shortfall of services increasing numbers of cars on the school run.

Barnet also suggests that the only economic alternative for some London operators will be to relocate outside of the M25 to avoid being charged for every non-compliant trip, with the exodus reducing the number of available coach services.

"Coaches used for school transport tend to be older vehicles and are less likely to comply with the emissions threshold," says the council's official response. "The council is concerned that coach operators may find it uneconomic to continue to provide school services and this could result in an increase in congestion and pollution associated with the school run if services are withdrawn."

Briefly

Thornes Independent of North Yorkshire threw open its gates to the public for a Wheels for the Wedding event – and attracted wedding suppliers across the board to exhibit their wares.

The show saw Thornes' heritage fleet of wedding buses take centre stage, including Wallace Arnold's old Leyland PD3 'decker.

The star of the show was, though, a stunning 1952 Beadle-Leyland integral which has just undergone a six-year restoration to return it to 'as-new' condition.

Police are appealing for witnesses to a collision between a coach and a motorcycle which left two people seriously injured.

The accident on the B3128 in Long Ashton, Somerset, resulted in the rider and pillion being taken to hospital, where the rider was said to be in a life-threatening condition.

Budget cuts in Edinburgh have resulted in the end of a village coach service from Clemiston to Gyle and Turnhouse, and now pensioners are fighting the closure. Now costing £975 a week, the service has latterly been run by EM Horsburgh. It is due to finish on June 2

Council cuts in Wales are forcing non-Catholic parents to send their children a further 20 miles to school... or pay bus fares.

St Albans RC School in Pontypool is closer for many children, but the local council's policy is to only allow free travel to faith schools for Roman Catholics.

The Dualway coach driver who killed an Irishwoman during a terrifying rampage in a new coach (*CBW* May 10) has been revealed to have been a former London policeman who once worked for London Transport Police.

Peter Clarke, who was arrested after a dramatic pursuit that included gunfire, had worked for Dublin Bus for a year before joining Dualway.

Briefly

Busy Bee services in Strabane are under threat of withdrawal owing to a spate of vandalism. No one has yet been injured in the attacks but operator Translink is considering removing services altogether. It is proposing to withdraw the services for one day to highlight the problems this will cause.

Walsall has become the first Black Country area to see the implementation of new, integrated passenger information for bus, train and tram networks. Timetable information has been provided by Centro to allow better co-ordination of the data in a bid to simplify travel planning and attract more people onto the public transport network. Walsall bus station was the first to gain access to the system which will be rolled out to all bus, train and tram stations in the West Midlands and progress to availability at stops and in vehicles.

Two days after being knocked down by a bus in Middlesbrough, pedestrian Michael Welch, 42, has died. The accident happened as Mr Welch was crossing the road just outside the James Cook University Hospital on May 9. Cleveland police are appealing for witnesses to the event.

Six young boys at a bus stop on Redbridge Road, Southampton, were sprayed with an unknown substance by the passenger in a passing car. The boys had items of clothing soaked by what police believe may have been petrol. No-one was hurt in the incident.

Protests against First Group in Bristol have taken a bizarre turn. A group calling themselves The Weather Girls have been 'entertaining' passengers, singing satirical songs while dressed in First-Group-a-like uniforms. Many customers reportedly thought it was an innovative marketing campaign until the trio handed out leaflets attacking the operator. First Group says the attention is 'flattering'.

Roger Jarvis, Blue Bus founder, has bought Whittakers Coach Travel of Preston

Blue Bus rides again

Less than nine months after selling his Blue Bus business to Arriva, Roger Jarvis is back in the bus business again after buying Whittaker's Coach Travel from its proprietor Richard Whittaker. The company, which is in the process of being renamed Whittaker's Blue Bus, is based at Penwortham near Preston and operates four Lancashire county council supported services in addition to some school contracts.

Mr Jarvis told *CBW* that Mr Whittaker wanted to concentrate on engineering work, and already has a lot of work in progress for the SELNEC Preservation trust, as well as continuing work on the WBB vehicles which comprise 10 Mercedes-Benz minibuses and a Volvo B10M decker. Seven of the minibuses are employed on the four routes which operate from Preston and Chorley, on the Blue Bus licence which was never surrendered by Mr Jarvis. Mr Whittaker has surrendered his own licence and no longer continues as an operator.

Mr Jarvis said that he was quite happy to keep the business small, unlike his former business which expanded to over 100 vehicles. He has plans to start up a short-term bus rental business, which will hire vehicles to operators, whose vehicle count is down due to accidents. "I'm going to buy half a dozen or so, low floor DDA compliant buses, and rent them out to operators that have got contract commitments but do not have a spare. I know that expensive buses can be off the road for some time, if you're waiting for insurance assessors and so on, but if someone rings me up from say Birmingham, and pays by credit card over the phone, he can have a fully fit bus for service the next morning," he said.

Brum bus crash

Nigel Eggleton, newly appointed operations director at the Birmingham Coach Company, had his first crisis to deal with last week after one of his company's single decker buses hit a wall in the city centre.

The damage was so extensive that eight fire fighters were needed to cut the driver out of the wreckage, but Mr Eggleton told *CBW* that the accident could have been much worse. Both the driver and his one passenger were taken to hospital as a precaution but neither were kept in overnight. No other vehicle was involved in the incident. The company is still investigating the cause.

Mr Eggleton told *CBW* that he is enjoying the challenge of working at BCC having previously held the same position at another Go-Ahead subsidiary, Oxford Bus Company. He says in the short term BCC needs stability but longer term the company will concentrate on developing its bus services, and National Express coach contracts.

Vehicles recalled

Wrightbus has issued a recall on Solar and Solar Fusion buses built until the end of January this year. A total of 79 vehicles are involved. The recall is for roof inspection door locks, which it says may fail allowing the roof door to fall on passengers. Recalled vehicles will have modified locking plates and safety straps fitted.

MAN has recalled 34 14.220 HOCL chassis to replace a cast rear axle mounting plate which may fracture, leaving the axle insecure.

Iveco has recalled 1,183 Daily vehicles built between November 1, 2004 and July 31, 2005, to check the nearside front brake pipe which can chafe on the shock absorber

Attack victim faces anxious wait

Oldbury driver may not regain his sight

The Travel West Midlands driver attacked after leaving his cab at Oldbury Bus interchange last week has left hospital, but faces an anxious wait to see if the sight returns to his left eye.

Police have not made any arrests, and are no closer to identifying a motive. Local press speculation suggests the attack may have been racially motivated after seven BNP councillors were elected in the recent council elections.

As reported in *CBW* last week, Jasbir Dhaliwall, 47, had just finished his shift driving the 120 bus and was talking to a fellow driver when he was suddenly attacked by a member of the public. He lost a tooth and sustained serious injuries to his eye. The man escaped.

TWM spokesman Phil Bateman tells *CBW*: "We are keen to ensure that we get the person responsible for this attack on our driver, who was just going about his duty serving the public. The latest information that we have is that the driver's eye injury is very serious, and that there is no guarantee that his sight will be returned in full. The police are driving the investigation, but they have not indicated officially the current status of the success that they have had in their inquiries."

A police spokesman told *CBW* no arrests had been made or were anticipated. It is not certain if the man was a passenger or was lying in wait at the interchange.

Jasbir Dhaliwall, TWM driver

Bravery awards for drivers

The Chancellor of the Exchequer last week presented the two bus drivers caught up in the terrorist attacks last July with awards to mark their bravery.

Geroge Psaradakis who was driving the bus bombed in Russell Square, and Mark Maybanks, who evacuated his bus in Hackney after a bomb was discovered, were presented with Gold Medals by fellow TGWU union member Gordon Brown.

"I think the people of London will say we have two heroes here today, but they represent the service of all public service workers across London," says the chancellor.

"We are proving by the actions of these two great men that while bombs can destroy buses and buildings the bravery of our people is quite simply indestructible."

Risk awareness course

A new value-for-money risk awareness course for drivers has been launched by Drive and Survive, which claims to highlight the major risk areas in just three hours.

The company says the workshop uses a relaxed and informal presentation style with a lot of audience input to get across a range of hints and tips to keep working drivers safe in a variety of potential risk situations. The course covers topics including:

- **The psychology behind what makes drivers take risks**
- **Tricks of the trade to avoid getting caught up in other driver's misjudgements**
- **Tips for improving anticipation skills**
- **The crucial role tyres play in driver safety**
- **The contribution to safety that can be made by modern-day chassis technology like ESP, ABS, and traction control**
- **The importance of safety-related vehicle maintenance**
- **Tactics for combating driver fatigue**
- **Hints for improving parking and confined space manoeuvring**
- **Ensuring lone driver personal safety**
- **Correct vehicle breakdown procedure**
- **Optimising driving style for maximum fuel-efficiency.**

The workshops cost £45 per head and sessions will be held in Windsor, Kenilworth and Derby at the end of June.

See *www.drivesurvive.co.uk* for more details.

Drive and Survive: ice cool driving skills could save money

Briefly

A Go North East decker, with 11 passengers on board, was hit by a council refuse lorry in Sunderland last week. The bus was in the bus lane when the lorry hit its side, smashing all the windows. One passenger injured her back, but no other injuries were reported. An investigation is underway.

A member of the public in Amersham has reported an Arriva driver for talking on a mobile phone while driving. He logged the exact time, date and location after witnessing the driver struggling to manoeuvre past a parked car and almost hitting an approaching vehicle, according to a report in the *Bucks Free Press*. A spokesman for Arriva says: "Appropriate action will be taken with the driver. We do not tolerate people using mobile phones while they are driving."

The driver of a school bus lost control of his vehicle after being hit by a water balloon in Londonderry, police have said. He was picking up students from Lumen Christi grammar school in Bishop Street on Thursday when the balloon was thrown at him. As a result of the attack he rolled back into a car. There were no reports of any injuries but the police said it could have had "serious consequences".

Just one CCTV camera, positioned over a bus lane in Camberwell, London, has taken £2m in the last year, making it the highest-earning camera in the capital. Nearly 20,000 drivers have been caught in the lane, on Camberwell New Road between Camberwell and Kennington in the last 12 months. TfL says its bus lane cameras are working – fines have reduced by 85% since January 2003.

Steve Pollinger, operations manager at First's Lawrence hill depot in Bristol, has been presented with an award for 26 years service. Steve started as a driver with Bristol Omnibus and spent 20 years behind the wheel.

Briefly

Twenty-one Egyptians were killed and many more injured when a bus overturned and plunged into a canal in Damietta, 160km from Cairo. The passengers were all factory workers. There are around 6,000 road accident deaths in the country each year, – twice the UK average, despite the same size population.

Right Angle Media unveiled the world's first air-conditioned bus shelter in Dubai last week. Also featuring vending machines, ATM cash machines and recycling bins, the authorities will roll out another 500 of the stops over the next 18 months.

Environmentalists in San Francisco allege that the air inside some school buses is up to ten times more sooty than the air outside. The Environmental Law Foundation and the Children's Earth Foundation have brought a law suit against the largest school transport provider in the state, Laidlaw Transit Inc, which runs a fleet of 40,000 buses. It wants the company to post warnings to this effect in all buses before the start of new term.

Oil price rises have led to ridership increases of 25% in many parts of Miami say city officials. A flurry of new minbus services have sprung up as elderly residents struggle to get to bus stops.

A Russian supermodel was injured recently after falling from a moving coach in New York. Tatjana Semanova had reportedly become disorientated after visiting the toilet. The vehicle was moving at 40mph at the time. She is expected to make a full recovery.

Milwaukee Common Council has passed a plan for a new $300m electric guided bus system. Construction is expected to start next year, and the system operational by 2012.

NABI unveils 42-BRT lowfloor bus

North American Bus Industries unveiled its new, lowfloor 42-BRT at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Bus & Paratransit Conference in Anaheim, California last week.

The 42-foot lowfloor, stylised transit bus carries a similar design to NABI's existing 60-BRT articulated vehicle.

"NABI's new concept model 42-BRT is a reliable, heavy-duty transit bus with sophisticated styling and enhanced passenger and driver accommodations," said Bob Shaughnessy, president and CEO of NABI. "Again, NABI responds in a technologically-advanced way to the transportation industry's demand for passenger-appealing BRT-type vehicles."

Actual length of the vehicle is 42.5 feet. The additional 2.5 feet over standard 40-foot buses allows four additional seats in the saloon and is aimed at customers wishing to maximize the seating capacity.

The prototype vehicle is powered by a CAT C9 diesel engine and conventional Allison B400R transmission. Like its larger articulated sister, the 42-BRT will also lend itself to hybrid or CNG propulsion, with hybrid equipment or CNG tanks completely concealed in the roof cavity.

Other features on the bus are similar to the 60-BRT hybrid with frameless windows and full-height door glazing on the slide-glide exit door. Additionally, the floor on the 42-BRT is a first trial of a space age composite material rather than conventional plywood.

Allison Transmission has received orders for 3,435 fully automatic Allison Transmissions for delivery in 2006 from Beijing Public Transport Holdings. The first order for 1,110 units of Torqmatic transmissions was received in early February 2006, with a supplemental order for an additional 2,325 units awarded in April 2006.

There are currently more than 4,000 Allison transmission-equipped city buses operating in Beijing both in 11-12 metre straight buses and in 14-18 metre articulated buses. These orders reaffirm Allison's leading position in China's commercial vehicle market. Together with a similar order of 2,200 units awarded in 2005, it will bring to 7,000 the number of buses equipped with Allison transmissions operating in Beijing by the end of 2006.

NABI's new concept lowfloor transit bus

Tata Motors & Marcopolo joint venture

Tata Motors, India's largest automobile company, and Marcopolo, the Brazil-based body-building specialist for buses and coaches, has announced a joint venture company in India to manufacture and assemble fully-built buses and coaches.

The new company, in which Tata Motors will hold 51% of the equity and Marcopolo will hold 49%, will set up a new manufacturing facility. It will go on stream in a year's time, and produce a variety of buses including 16 to 54-seater standard buses, 18 and 45-seater luxury buses, luxury coaches, and low-floor city buses.

The joint venture will also explore emerging opportunities in Bus Rapid Transit Systems.

The venture will combine Tata Motors' technology and expertise in chassis and aggregates with the systems for bodybuilding and bus body design from Marcopolo. Both companies will actively participate in the management. The buses will conform to international standards in quality and safety, and will be marketed not only in India but also in all Tata Motors-focused markets globally.

Caterpillar ready for 2007

Engine manufacturer Caterpillar demonstrated to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last week that it can meet the stringent 2007 emissions standards.

"In 1988, the average EPA compliant heavy-duty engine travelling 120,000 miles in a year emitted about 470 pounds of particulate matter," said Caterpillar president Doug Oberhelman. "The engine we demonstrated today, and the engines our customers will use in 2007, will emit less than eight pounds of particulate matter a year, a reduction of approximately 98%."

In May of 2005 Caterpillar demonstrated a 2007 compliant engine for President George Bush at an event in Virginia. The President examined a white handkerchief that had been held over the exhaust stack of a truck as the engine was revved. Following the demonstration, the handkerchief was still white.

Caterpillar is using clean gas induction and a diesel particulate filter to ensure the engines meet 2007 EPA standards.

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ALEXANDER DENNIS

RBS and AirportcarZ do a deal for free staff transport

Bank's taxibus service offers flexibility, reduces pollution and saves money

The Royal Bank of Scotland Group (RBS) has contracted AirportcarZ to provide a free-to-board shuttle in Edinburgh.

RBS recognised the problems and cost of transport shortly after its World Headquarters opened in September 2005 at Gogarburn. Up to 10,000 employees occupy the new HQ building and other locations in the city, and staff movements between the various RBS sites in Edinburgh and to and from Edinburgh International Airport number hundreds each week.

Now AirportcarZ has set up a 'taxibus' service using seven O-licensed Ford Tourneos, which though they don't charge fares to any of the passengers, are saving the RBS money and helping it achieve environmental aims.

From AirportcarZ's point of view, being O-licensed instead of registered on local authority private hire licensing allows the Tourneos to use bus lanes, carry RBS branding, and gives flexibility when vehicles need to be replaced.

Until recently, many of the staff and visitor transfers were completed by individual taxi journeys. Taxi fares for such journeys varied greatly according to the journey, time, day, passenger numbers, traffic, etc. In addition, the bank's environmental policies encourage efforts to reduce congestion and pollution caused by unnecessary single-occupant taxi use.

The opening of the new HQ and the introduction of the RBS Gogarburn Travel Plan demanded a fresh approach to the issue of staff and visitor transport, one element of which was the introduction of a dedicated Taxibus service. Malcolm Berry, general manager of AirportcarZ, which is based at Edinburgh International Airport, worked closely with RBS to analyse their travel requirements and devise a practical and cost-effective solution.

The resulting RBS Taxibus service is provided by seven luxury Ford Tourneo minibuses on given routes covering all RBS main office sites and the airport. The service is on a flexible bus registration.

RBS staff and visitors arriving and departing from Edinburgh International Airport enjoy special facilities in that the AirportcarZ collection point is immediately outside the Terminal Building. There is no walking to or from car parks.

Ford Tourneos run on O licences provide the free-to-board service under contract to Royal Bank of Scotland

These seven vehicles cater for many varied inter-site staff demands previously carried out in part by individual taxi journeys. The routes vary at different times of the day to deal with peaks of demand.

The service is flexible enough to also incorporate courier and mail deliveries without inconveniencing passenger demands. All vehicles carry a whole vehicle wrap of the RBS logo, thus providing a significant form of advertising at the airport and throughout the city of Edinburgh.

There is no necessity for staff to book ahead. However, if staff do require this option, where possible AirportcarZ staff will divert a suitable vehicle (without inconveniencing any passengers on board) in order to offer an accurate time of pick-up.

No fares are paid to the operator. The cost is based upon a rate per vehicle, per hour of service.

In addition to the dedicated RBS Taxibus service, Malcolm Berry coordinates some RBS executive passenger transport needs, special events transportation and other such requirements of RBS in Edinburgh.

AirportcarZ is delighted with the results of this service and expects that there are many corporations in the UK and wider Europe that could adopt the same system and achieve the same benefits in cost, environmental and staff satisfaction terms

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

SCOTLAND

The **Scottish Executive** has proposed a concessionary travel scheme for the under-18s. Teenagers currently pay around 70% of the adult fare, but financial support from the Executive should reduce this to around a third. The aim is to cut down on school run congestion, and promote the use of public transport. The scheme should be launched next year. It has been welcomed by opposition parties, and unanimously endorsed by the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Passengers in **Edinburgh** are complaining that new RTPI screens are unreadable in bright sunlight. Around 150 of the new signs have been installed. The scheme was delayed by a month because of a row between the city and Scottish Power over a £200,000 electricity bill, now resolved.

NORTH

Plans for a new bus station in **Skipton** have been put on hold after North Yorkshire County Council's Local Transport Plan funding was cut by £3m. The £1.5m scheme has been put back to 2008/9. Meanwhile, £55,000 has been allocated in this financial year for improved bus shelters and passenger information. The council says that because the new station will "significantly enhance the built environment", it hopes to attract funding from other sources.

A network of six weekend night buses has been introduced in **Doncaster** with funding from the Doncaster Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The joint initiative between Doncaster Borough Council, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, South Yorkshire Police and First, will be evaluated and if successful, may lead to further night bus networks being set up in other South Yorkshire centres.

All the buses are operated by **First** and make four journeys at hourly intervals on Friday and Saturday nights, with a flat fare of £3. An extensive marketing campaign, targeted at pub and club goers is now being rolled out across Doncaster.

Police Inspector Iain Chorlton of the Doncaster Evening Economy Partnership said that the introduction of night buses was a great opportunity to enhance the safety and enjoyment of pubbers and clubbers. "To ensure this, extra police officers and other partners will be deployed as 'Bus Marshalls' to provide both a reassuring presence, and to ensure standards of behaviour," he said.

First in Manchester has issued a strong warning to youngsters about the dangers of 'bus surfing' after a 16-year-old boy narrowly escaped being killed after falling off a single decker bus in **Bolton**.

The boy was knocked unconscious when he fell, and was then hit by a car following behind. He was not seriously injured and was discharged later from hospital after being treated for cuts and bruises.

A First Manchester spokesman says: "This sort of behaviour is foolhardy and very dangerous. The company condemns it utterly.

"It is not a common occurrence in Bolton, although we have had some incidents in the past, but it is something that is seen within the bus industry across the country.

"It was lucky this boy wasn't killed. But there is a fatal accident waiting just around the corner for those who chose to take part in this reckless practice."

The driver had just dropped off his last passengers at the Doffcocker terminus and was completely unaware that the boy had jumped onto the rear bumper of the vehicle shortly afterwards.

First in Manchester has also introduced a new trial service in Higher Irlam, called Overground Link. The dedicated feeder service, using an Optare Solo, takes passengers from the Moss Vale Estate to link up with the showcase 67 route. Out of hours, the 67 will return to the estate. The service was developed between First and GMPTE. The concept may be extended to other areas if successful.

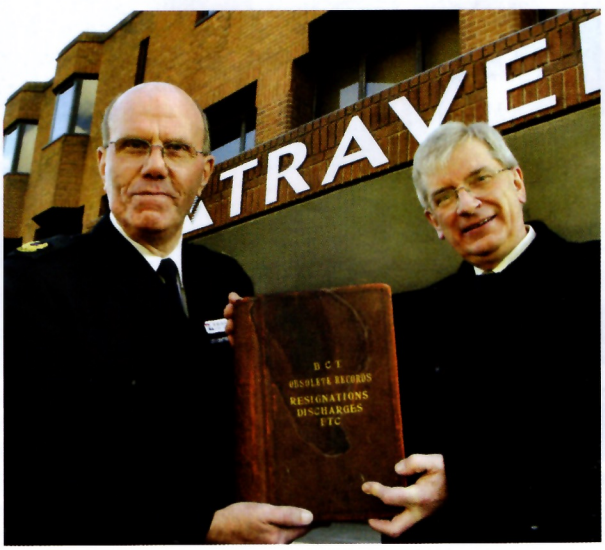
MIDLANDS

The newest exhibit at the Aston Manor Transport Museum was discovered by chance at **TWM**'s Lea Hall garage.

Trade Union chairman Mick Roche found the Discharge Book for the years 1901-1951 in a cupboard at the depot and, along with TWM's city manager John Wright, decided to donate the book to the museum.

Mr Wright says: "I think it is a real gem in the history of Birmingham City Transport and am glad that we have found a good home for the impressive book. Personally, I had a lot of interest in its contents as it mentions my grandfather who was also a long-standing BCT employee."

The museum is open every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday. For



John Wright, left, with Geoff Lusher from the Aston Manor Transport Museum

Briefly

A Donegal Celtic football fan sustained a hand injury after the bus he was travelling on came under attack by rival supporters. Bricks and stones were thrown at the vehicle while it was on its way back to Belfast after the game with Institute FC on Wednesday. It was the only trouble reported at the match.

The 10-year redevelopment plan for Chichester, Sussex, which includes a new bus station, is out for public consultation. The current bus station will be developed into shops and housing while the existing railway station car park will be converted into a bus and rail interchange. The consultation lasts until June 16.

Briefly

Stagecoach North West and Cumbria County Council have teamed up to trial state-of-the-art electronic RTPI displays at selected bus stops in Carlisle. If successful – and the company says passengers have taken to the system already since the trial began last week – the system will be extended to other routes in the city.

Stagecoach North East is blaming recent price increases on rising fuel costs. Most fares rise by 10p, although the popular daily travelcard has actually been reduced by the same amount. Commercial manager Doug Elphee told the local paper: "We have got various other costs such as wages, but it is more a case of fuel causing the increase." He also said that pensioner passenger numbers have increased by 20% since the introduction of concessionary travel.

Far from being saved, as reported in *CBW* two weeks ago, Norwich's Orbital bus service is back on the block, with councillors giving it a less than 50% chance of survival.

Translink officially launched the first of its fleet of Ayats Bravo 3 accessible coaches last week, the first of their kind in the UK. For use on its Goldline Express service, which has experienced growth of 16% since its launch two years ago, the lowfloor coaches have a wide entrance door for easy accessibility. The vehicles are fitted with digital CCTV, anti-lock brakes, tinted windows, air conditioning, individual overhead lighting and ventilation controls, heated windscreens, a bridge warning system and electric luggage doors. The new arrival is the first of 25 Ayats Bravos ordered by Translink as part of a £50m investment in vehicles. Left to right: Carmen Vila, Ayats, Keith Moffatt, Chief Executive, Translink, Vince Welsh, Neoman UK , Barbara Fleming, Disability Action.

details see *www.amrtm.org.*

Nottingham City Transport inspectors will work with the Police to crack down on the use of forged bus tickets and passes in the city. The Police think that school or university students could be behind the scam. A police officer told the BBC: "There is a suggestion that a ticket template is being used." The officers will also be on the look out for violent behaviour and motorists who drive and park in bus lanes.

Stagecoach Warwickshire roadside publicity officer John Gwynne has taken on the massive task of mapping out the regions 6,000 bus stops in a bid to improve the company's travel information. He will start in Nuneaton and hopes to finish in Leamington Spa by the end of the summer. The company says it will also improve the standards of its bus stops.

LONDON

Operation Mayfly – a two-week crackdown on anti-social behaviour on buses in **Enfield** – has got underway in the London borough.

A mix of up to 28 uniformed and plain clothes officers are patrolling problem bus routes, responding to a massive increase in crime. Robberies, which averaged three a day last year, have leapt to six a day this year.

The rise has been blamed on children carrying expensive electronic equipment like MP3 players and mobile phones, but the Police suspect that free travel for under-16s, and Enfield's disproportionate number of secondary schools, are the real cause.

However, this has been discounted by Dave Jones, commercial support manager for **Arriva London**. He says: "Since the introduction of free travel for 11 to 16 year olds, we have noticed an increase in bus usage but have no statistics to suggest a rise in crime."

SOUTH WEST

Two **First Devon and Cornwall**-sponsored Gold Star Awards have been awarded to local people, in conjunction with the local newspaper. The awards are made monthly to people who have excelled in the community – one man risked his life to pull another out of a burning car. The other award was given to a couple who set up a group for bereaved parents after they had a stillborn child last year.

Cornwall County Council is waiting for the DfT to make a decision about funding for improvements to links with the Scilly Isles. The Council bid for £26.5m from government for the £40m scheme, which will see a new passenger and freight ferry and upgrades to St Mary's and Penzance harbours.

Bus marshals will be introduced to night services in **Bristol**. Two marshals – trained by the Security Industry Association – will travel on each service, with a walkie-talkie link to the city council CCTV control room. They will wear fluorescent jackets and be equipped with head cameras and audio-visual recording equipment. They will work on eight routes, between midnight and 03:00am, Fridays and Saturdays.

Roadworks

A66 Penrith
Current: One lane closed due to bridge maintenance work on M6 both ways at J40.

M60 Greater Manchester
Current: One lane clsoed for barrier repairs anti-clockwise between J24 (A57) and J23 (A6410/A635).

M1 Hertfordshire
Until December 31, 2008: Speed restriction of 40 mph and narrow lanes both ways between J6A M25 and J10 M1 (Luton Airport).

M25 Waltham Abbey
Until December 31: One lane closed and 40mph speed restriction both ways between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121). Exit sliproad closed at J25 clockwise.

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon).

M4 Taunton
Until July 31: Speed restriction of 50mph between J25 (A358) and J26 (A38).

M4 South Gloucestershire
Until August 31: Speed restriction and narrow lanes both ways between J18 (A46) and J19 (M32).

M4 Wiltshire
Until May 27: Lane closed due to roadworks between J15 (A419) and J16 (A3102/B4005).

A38 West Midlands
Until June 19: Bassett's Pole Island. Closed for widening to three lanes from 20:00 until 06:00 weekends between May 19-May 22; June 2-June 5; June 9-June 12; and June 16-June 19.

M6 Staffordshire
Until June 30: Speed restriction of 40 mph due to resurfacing work on M6 Northbound between J12 A5 (Gailey) and J13 A449 (Stafford South).

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Buoyant group business forecast for London

London has recovered from the horrors of last year and the capital is back in favour as a group destination.

That is the optimistic forecast from Tony Hess, of London specialist LHTS, who report that enquiries from both the UK and the overseas group markets are up on the first five months of this year compared to the same period in 2005. The buoyancy of the market has been helped in no small way by the healthy state of theatre ticket sales.

The number of new musicals that have opened recently, or will soon open, in the West End have generated a lot of interest in the UK coach market. This summer LHTS is offering packages to Evita, which opens in June, and to Billy Elliot, which is still pulling in the crowds at the Victoria Palace. Overnight package prices with top price seats to see Evita start from £86 per person.

At the end of November, The Sound of Music opens at The London Palladium, while Wicked opens at the Apollo Victoria in September and Spamalot opens at the Palace Theatre in October. LHTS has tickets available for all performances for all the top West End shows, including Saturday performances.

LHTS is offering overnight packages to the British International Motor Show, which is taking place at the Excel Exhibition Centre in the Docklands from July 20 to 31. Overnight packages prices start from only £36 per person and include entrance to the show. Throughout August LHTS will again be offering tours of Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament, together with river cruises (with or without lunch) and trips on the London Eye.

The demand for accommodation in London for those ever-popular weekends at the end of the year is under way and also for weekends in January. If central London is too expensive, operators may wish to consider using hotels at Heathrow. Prices start from £26 per person for Saturday night stays.

Looking further ahead, LHTS is offering a selection of packages that incorporate festive themes. One option is staying at the four-star Holiday Inn Regents Park for three nights from Christmas Eve. The price of £116 per person includes half-board accommodation and lunch on Christmas Day.

■ For bookings and more information, call LHTS on 0207 233 5322 (fax 0207 233 5250).

Battle lines: enjoy the thrill of combat at Rockingham Castle

Call to arms at Rockingham

A visit to a stately home provides an ideal excursion opportunity for coach operators and one county that has a wealth of historic attractions is Northamptonshire.

One of the most striking of these attractions is Rockingham Castle, which is just outside Corby and is staging its annual jousting tournament and medieval encampment on Sunday June 4.

The event, which is one of the biggest days in the Castle's programme, is staged by the Nottingham Jousting Association and sees knights vie to become the King's Champion on horseback and in one-to-one armed combat. The Oxford Household is back at the castle to establish its recreation of a 15th century encampment in which the liveried troops of the Earl of Oxford muster and train for battle.

Gates open at noon and the castle at 1pm and the events take place through

Free spirit: learn about ghostly goings-on in Edinburgh

Close encounters in Edinburgh

Put your groups in good spirits by booking a tour of the Real Mary King's Close, which will unearth the secrets of Edinburgh. The Close is hidden beneath the Royal Mile and is a warren of streets where people lived and worked. It dates from the 17th century and guides in character inform visitors of life in those hard times and how an outbreak of plague led to stories of ghosts being seen.

The tours are very popular so pre-booking is recommended. Groups of 15 or more qualify for discounted admission rates and fast-track entry. There is free admission and a hot drink for coach drivers and group organisers. Lunch and afternoon tea may be arranged at a number of venues around the city.

Packages are also available

the afternoon. Combined event and castle entry tickets costs £9.50 for adults, £8.50 for senior citizens and £6.50 for children. Tickets for the event only are £7.50, £6.50 and £4.50 respectively.

Rockingham Castle is open on Tuesday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays from June to September from noon to 5pm. Guided tours for groups of 20 or more cost £8.50 for adults for a private tour and £6.50 on open days. Tickets for children cost £3.25.

■ For more information call 01536 770240, email: estateoffice@rockinghamcastle.com or go to *www.rockinghamcastle.com*

for private evening hire of Real Mary King's Close. These can be tailored to individual group needs and can include canapés and champagne, themed Scottish menus and the provision of costumed characters.

■ For bookings and more information, call 08702 411415.

■ The Mary King's Ghost Fest is running until Sunday May 21, during which visitors will be able to take part in overnight paranormal investigations, learn about electronic voice phenomenon and attend workshops, talks and seminars. More details on 08702 430 160 or go to *www.edinburghghostfest.com*

Push the boat out on the Tyne

Groups visiting Tyneside this summer should find time to take a Tyne River Tour. The 40-minute trips from South Shields ferry landing were introduced by Nexus last year on a trial basis and proved so popular with visitors that they are being run again.

The cruises, which come complete with a guide commentary that celebrate Tyneside's heritage and landmarks, will be run at 11:15am and 14:15 every Thursday and Sunday. The morning tour will travel east to the mouth of the Tyne, pass North Shields Fish Quay and take in Tynemouth Castle Priory. The afternoon cruise will head west as far as the AMEC shipyard, passing the Customs House, the Scandinavian ferry terminal and other landmarks.

Prices are £1.50 plus the appropriate ferry fare. A round trip starting and finishing at the same ferry landing will cost £3.45 for adults and £2.50 for children.

Mike Parker, the director general of Nexus, said: "The cruises were introduced for a five-month trial run last year and were a big success, so we are pleased to offer them again this summer. They are popular not only with residents of North and South Tyneside but also with the growing number of visitors to the region."

The ferry cruises will run until September 28 and will not operate on June 11, July 2, 9, 16 and 30, August 6 and 20 and September 10.

■ For more information go to *www.nexus.org.uk*

Ferry good: take a heritage cruise through Tyneside

The cream of Devon

Operators who want to get the best of the west should check out the new group organisers' guide, *Explore Exeter & The Heart of Devon.*

In Exeter groups can discover the history of the city on a tour led by a Red Coat Guide. There is a variety of walking tours or the guide can board the coach for a full tour of the area. Exeter is also a mecca for shoppers, with more than 700 retail outlets.

Heading out into the countryside, groups can visit the World Heritage Jurassic Coast, tour rugged Dartmoor and Exmoor and visit a wide variety of historic houses, castles, working museums and gardens.

There is a one-stop booking service that will help operators to organise a Red Coat Guide, book a visit to the Quay House Visitor Centre, tailor itineraries to individual group needs, provide advice about accommodation and meal stops and give details of coach parking, set-down points and facilities for drivers.

Exeter City Council is running a day familiarisation trip on Wednesday, October 18, and a weekend trip from Friday to Sunday, October 20 to 22.

■ For more details and a copy of the guide, call Debbie Lewis, on 01392 265204.

By royal appointment

As this year marks the Queen's 80th birthday, tours with royal connections will sure to be popular with coach groups. One popular destination is Sandringham, the Norfolk retreat for the royal family.

The house was built in 1870 by the Prince and Princess of Wales, later King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, and visitors can tour the main ground floor rooms, admire the fleet of royal vehicles, hunting trophies and arts and crafts in the museum and stroll around the 60 acres of gardens.

Sandringham is open daily until Sunday October 29, except for the period between July 21 and 28. The house is open from 11am to 4.45pm (3pm in October), the museum from 11am to 5pm (4pm in October) and the gardens are open from 1.30am to 5pm (4pm in October).

Admission prices to the house, garden and museum are £8 for adults, £6.50 for senior citizens and £5 for children from five to 15. Tickets for the gardens and museum only are £5.50, £4.50 and £3.50 respectively. Discounts are available for groups of 20 or more and guided garden tours available by prior arrangement.

Special events include the Sandringham Horse Driving Trials from June 30 to July 2, the Sandringham Flower Show on July 26 ands the Game Fair and Country show on August 12 and 13.

■ For more information and a group booking form, contact the Public Enterprises Department, the Estate Office, Sandringham, Norfolk PE35 6EN. Tel: 01553 612908 or email: visits@sandringhamestate.co.uk

The Queen's birthday has increased interest in the royal residences

Commissioner announces Rush Travel decision

John Rush and his sister Margaret Gray have failed in their attempt to obtain a new operators licence after facing North Eastern Area Traffic Commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney at a public inquiry in March (*CBW* March 29)

Their application for a new standard national licence authorising two vehicles, in the name of John Rush, trading as J Rush Coach Hire, would have had Mrs Gray as Transport Manager, and be based at Brenkley Yard, Brenkley Way, Blezzard Business Park, Seaton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne – the same premises where both Rush travel and A Coach Company were based.

Brigadier Macartney expressed his displeasure at the applicants' history, as both were disqualified directors of the Rush Travel company, whose licence had been revoked twice, following four public inquiries between 10 January 2003 and 15 March 2005. In a complicated judgement, he found that Mrs Gray lacked the repute to become Transport Manager, and Mr Rush lacked the necessary good repute to be the holder of an operator's licence.

"Mrs Gray's attitude to the function of Transport Manager is cavalier in the extreme and, given problems which were known to her in the past as a director of a small firm, I have no confidence that she is willing or capable of improvement. Mrs Gray is not fit to be involved in any operator's licence anywhere in the country. This application is refused on the grounds of a lack of professional competence," stated the Traffic Commissioner.

"Mr Rush has applied to re-enter the industry, despite a track record which is awful, and he has failed to convince me that he is ready or able to re-enter the industry. I make this statement without considering the activities of Rush Travel Limited and Mr Rush after May 27, 2005 when his licence was finally revoked," he said.

The Traffic Commissioner also dealt with post revocation events, when a franchising company led by Steve Hyson called 'A Coach Company' sprang up to take over Rush Travel contracts, and subsequently made an application for an operators licence which was refused after a public inquiry (*CBW*, January 5).

"After May 27, 2005 Mr Rush continued to operate under an illegal scheme which was designed to conceal and obfuscate the continued operation by Mr Rush using his drivers and his vehicles, whilst borrowing discs from a variety of other operators illegally," he said.

"This was a deliberate attempt to circumvent the regulatory regime using A Coach Company (NE) Limited as a phoenix to camouflage the true nature of the business. Those involved in such deceptions are unfit to hold an operator's licence. Mr Rush and Mrs Gray have exacerbated my low opinion of their repute. I find it difficult to imagine them ever being fit to return to the PCV industry."

Saltaire back after inquiry

Bradford City FC contract and ski tours to form the mainstay of new business

Newcomer Saltaire Travel of Baildon, West Yorkshire, has gained a second operators licence for new international operations, undertaking football club work and possible ski holiday operations.

Proprietor Rickie Wakelin, also proposed David Betts as his transport manager, and his application was accepted on the grounds that a previous revocation had been spent after five years.

North Eastern traffic commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney told Mr Wakelin, that if his operations were as described, and they received a clean bill of health from VOSA, he was satisfied that the new business could make money.

Rickie Wakelin, trading as Saltaire Travel Ltd, based at the Coach Depot, Otley Road, Baildon, Shipley, West Yorkshire, faced a public inquiry at Hillcrest House, Leeds, to consider regulatory action over concerns of repute and professional competence. In addition, he had lodged a new application for five vehicles on a standard international licence in the name of Saltaire Coaches Ltd., and the inquiry would consider further concerns of repute and professional competence. In addition, the inquiry would consider the Transport Manager's repute.

What the operator said

Introducing his application, Mr Wakelin said that he had set up Saltaire Travel in May 2005, with his business partner Jayne Bentley, and held a licence for three vehicles. He had now set up a new company Saltaire Coaches, with Ms Bentley as co-director, and wished to set up a totally separate operation. He had won a two-year contract to provide a team coach for Bradford City Football Club, and was in the process of obtaining a Neoplan Starliner coach for the contract.

He anticipated some continental operation for the club, and had held

Traffic commissioner Brigadier Tom Macartney

Key points

- **Brigadier Macartney told the operator that if his operations were as described and received a clean bill of health from VOSA, he was satisfied**
- **Mr Betts' revocation was now over five years old and the Traffic Commissioner considered it spent**
- **The operator had won a new two year contract to provide a team coach for Bradford City Football Club**

talks with a Ski Holiday company, which had invited him to operate on their behalf next year.

At present, his main activity was running a party bus from surrounding villages into Leeds city centre, and he owned a double deck Olympian coach, which was also operated on school contracts during the day. The party bus provided safe transport after 11 pm, and visited bars and clubs in Leeds, before returning everyone safely home. It usually operated on Friday and Saturday nights, and occasionally on Thursdays. Sometimes incoming hen nights were booked, and the revellers were chaperoned around the Leeds party circuit.

Mr Wakelin said that he also owned a 49-seater coach for normal operation, and had a Routemaster double decker for weddings and private parties.

Mr Wakelin stated that he had safety ingrained in him since the age of 17, having been a former airline pilot. He said that he held strict business standards, and as an example, he stated that he had dismissed three drivers for not performing their walk round checks properly, even though there was a shortage of drivers.

He said that he had intended to employ David Betts as transport manager of both companies, and he would be at work for about 20 hours per week. "When I first met Mr Betts, I wanted over and above a transport manager. I'm about looking at how to shape the business, and I want Mr Betts to ensure the safety and competence of the business," he said.

What the traffic commissioner said

Cross examined by the traffic commissioner, Mr Wakelin said that he held a pilot's licence, and had held a PCV licence for the last three years. He said that he had flown 757s and 767s for British Airways, until he was 25, and suffered a perforated eardrum in Dubai. He said that he was now 37 years old and was too old for another airline to take him on again, and that even if he could, he would have to face complicated re-training before being able to work again. Answering questions about his party bus, he said that the bus did not have any alcohol aboard, but he ran another business supplying wine to bars.

"So you just take the drinkers home then!" said the traffic commissioner.

Speaking to Mr Betts, Brigadier Macartney said that the reason the public inquiry was being held was that he had his licence revoked in 2001, and had been found to have lost his repute when he traded as Ambassador Executive Coaches of Yeadon, West Yorkshire.

Giving evidence, Mr Betts said that he had been given a very thorough interrogation by Mr Wakelin, who was very meticulous, and expected very high standards. He said that the plan was that he would look after the maintenance and tachograph records, and his responsibilities would include ensuring that all the vehicles were in a roadworthy condition, and that all drivers were fully trained.

He said that at present the company had only two full time drivers, but there were also two applicants.

Delivering his verdict, the traffic Commissioner said that Mr Betts' revocation was now over five years old, and he now considered it spent. "If VOSA checks your fleet, and everything is as described, then it will all be OK."

Granting the new application in full, he said, "You might be the kind of operator that VOSA would like people to look at."

"I hope you do well, make money and that I don't meet you professionally again."

Other decisions

NORTH EASTERN

Leeds, April 21
United Taxis (Contracts) Ltd T/A United Taxis, Darlington
Action taken:
*** PSV - S17 - Formal warning.**
*** Transport manager repute remains intact.**

Leeds, April 21
Margaret Mason Martindale T/A Martindales Taxis And Minicoaches, Newton Aycliffe
*** PSV - S17 - Licence revoked with effect from 23.59 hours 22 April 2006**
*** PSV - S28 - Mrs M M Martindale disqualified with effect from 22 April 2006 for a period of 5 years**

Leeds, April 28
Alan David Lowe T/A Lowes Coaches, Hucknall, Nottingham
Action taken:
*** S17 - Formal warning in respect of breach of undertakings recorded**

NORTH WESTERN

Warrington, March 2
Stephen Ronald Ashton T/A Bank View Travel, Penwortham , Preston Pr1 9ss
Action taken:
*** S17 - curtailed - condition attached.**
*** Formal warning**

SOUTH EAST AND METROPOLITAN

Eastbourne, April 27
Airport Parking & Hotels Ltd, Crawley Down , Crawley Rh10 3eq
Action taken:
*** PSV - S16 - Application granted as applied for**
*** PSV - S17 - Formal warning**

ROTHERA DOWSON

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FREE employment law

Coach and Bus Week has come up with what really must be a world first - FREE advice from a lawyer! You're just a phone call away from solving your employment problem

CBW has teamed up with specialist Transport Lawyers Stone King LLP to offer readers exclusive access to free Employment Law Telephone Seminars.

Stone King LLP is hosting a series of telephone seminars to answer questions raised by readers. The idea is simple; just let us know your question in advance, then if you're selected, join a lively telephone conference with other operators to discuss your question and others.

Maybe you're worried about the new 'ageism' rules; will that stop you advertising for young tour drivers... or even asking for people with long experience? Do you have to give a second chance to a driver who's rude to your customers? What employment rights does your new and useless receptionist have?

If you want to join in, simply email your name, your contact number and your question to *peterwoodhouse@stoneking.co.uk*. Alternatively, fax the information to 01225 33 54 37.

Stone King LLP will then send you an invitation to the telephone seminar to be held with an Employment Law specialist and other bus and coach operators to discuss your query. This is an invaluable opportunity to gain expert legal opinion and to discuss with other operators common issues affecting employment in the industry.

The first seminar will be held in the next few weeks. Places are very limited so please reserve your place as soon as possible.

It will be appreciated that the seminars are not a substitute for bespoke legal advice and by their nature can provide only general comment. If you have a need for specific legal advice either contact your own solicitor or Peter Woodhouse on peterwoodhouse@stoneking.co.uk

Send your letters to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to: Inbox, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

Buenos Aires bus... or are Sue's eyes deceiving her

A Token Woman responds

Sue Reynolds' comments in Open Platform about men and model buses elicited a particularly pedantic reply. She has chosen to spare the blushes of the man who questioned her definition of Havana's 'camel buses', by not naming him, and provides this response...

Dear Doubtful,

Herewith my photo of a London Routemaster, stuck in a traffic jam in Buenos Aires.

With regard to the Camel Bus, I appreciate that structurally it is a tractor unit with articulated trailer and therefore might be better described as a truck. However, it is also a road vehicle designed and operated to supply mass transportation of people and can therefore be described as a bus.

But them I am just a woman, so what do I know?

Sue Reynolds, Reynolds Diplomat, Watford

Labour's BSOG confusion

Dear Sir, I read in your magazine that the government will not be extending BSOG to coaches - ('Ladyman in 'no' shock' *CBW*, April 26), yet I read in other trade magazines that the government will be reviewing BSOG over the next few years as part of its business plan.

I find it very hard to accept of course that Ladyman is in the dark about what the rest of his department is planning, so what is the truth here please gentlemen?

I also read with interest your series of interviews with politicians. Would I be right in thinking that you are planning one with the Secretary of State himself? If so, will you be putting this question directly to him?

I think we should be told!

Sincerely

John Barker, Traffic manager

Mr Barker, thanks very much for your letter. It's a shame you haven't put the name of your company as we would have given you letter of the week but we don't know where to send your prize! Regarding your point about whether the government is planning to change the rules on BSOG or not, good question, it is something we are puzzling over too. Like you we find it inconceivable that a minister could be saying one thing and his department another, so we can only think that somebody somewhere is getting a little bit confused... You are right to surmise that we are planning an interview with the secretary of state, and that the question of BSOG will be near the top of the list.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

David Cameron may have 'spoken out' on school buses but I fear the Conservatives have more interest in populism than children and buses.

"If you make it an attractive alternative then people will be quite happy to get out of their cars," he says. And this from a man whose cycling takes place with a car in close pursuit to carry those irksome papers.

He's right about American school buses, but does he see those monstrosities built from old Kenworth timber tractors as 'an attractive alternative'? And as for his '6% use the bus' I have a strong suspicion that: 1) Your figure of 32% is closer, and that 2) the percentage of his fellow Etonians who went to school by bus is rather less than 1%.

The problem with school buses isn't with the buses or the funding but with the weird snobbery of a population of people you can separate into those who will travel by bus, and those who never will. Yet the same people who don't want to board a new ALX400 in London will merrily disappear down a dark hole to travel on a filthy, clapped-out Tube train.

Add to that the resistance we're now seeing to council school bus cuts, and we're in deep trouble. These are parents - whose children have no entitlement - who will protest and even, I read, 'expose themselves' to councillors rather than pay £1 return to take their progeny three miles or more in safety.

The author of the real Conservative policy on buses was Maggie Thatcher when she said that if you're still travelling on the bus at 26, you can count yourself one of life's failures. If the Tories pursue an agenda of funding a school bus scheme it will be for one reason; it's cheap. I'll be convinced otherwise only when I meet one of the Shadow Cabinet on a coach holiday or on the 148 from Park Lane to Westminster.

Name and address supplied

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

***CBW* is the only paid-for weekly news magazine for the coach and bus industry. Each week the magazine provides a unique insight. Your views are always welcome. Write to the editor at the above address.**

Hi-tech Fastway finalised

This month sees the completion of the final part of the Fastway bus route around Gatwick Airport. David Crawford reports on one of the largest ever intelligent transport bus systems

May 2006 marks the final stage in the delivery of the £39 million Fastway hi-tech bus service for London Gatwick Airport and its hinterland. Installation of the final sets of 'smart' traffic lights will ensure bus priority at key junctions throughout the 24km network.

Fastway links Crawley (in West Sussex) and Horley (in Surrey) with major local employment centres – including the UK's second-largest airport and Crawley's sprawling industrial estates and business parks – as well as main-line rail services at Crawley, Gatwick Airport, Horley and Three Bridges stations. The twin-route service, the result of a four-year construction programme, is a response to rising road congestion levels along the Gatwick Airport Corridor.

It represents one of the UK's largest-ever applications to date to bus travel, in southern England outside London, of modern intelligent transport systems (ITS) technologies. These include, as well as traffic signal priority (TSP), advanced real-time passenger information (RTPI) – both supported by physical elements including guided busways, in a package aimed at making bus travel more reliable and hence more attractive.

The 17-strong fleet of low emission, specially-adapted Scania Omnicity buses is equipped with on-board units (OBUs) developed for accurate automatic vehicle location (AVL). Each contains a GPS-based satellite receiver – to enable tracking of the precise location of every vehicle in service, and monitoring of its movements – and a computer, pre-loaded with full timetable data. Drivers log onto the system through their ticketing machines when starting out.

Buses transmit the resulting data from both West Sussex and Surrey sections of the route via digital private mobile radio (PMR) to Surrey County Council's Network Management and Information Centre (NMIC). This is run by public transport technology specialist Advanced Communication and Information Systems (ACIS), which has also installed the Fastway system.

The NMIC processes and rebroadcasts the information by digital PMR to RTPI displays installed at intelligent bus stops along the route, which calculate and display arrival times giving predicted intervals to next buses on routes served. (In the absence of a prediction, they default to timetable information – a stand-by not always available with other UK bus RTPI systems).

Refinements

In a further, recent, refinement, the system can now take account of the catch-up and turn-round time needed by a late-running bus when nearing its terminus. This enables it to give more accurate arrival predictions at early stops on return routes.

The system also feeds a travel information website, accessible via *www.fastway.info*, which is operated by ACIS for Surrey County Council – one of four local authorities involved in the Fastway Partnership (see box). This gives running service updates for major stops on the service selected. Clicking on a route and a listed stop opens a departure board containing real-time departure information, filtered to focus on relevant services.

Other RTPI outlets include mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) such as blackberries that support full Internet browsing, and a foyer ›

screen and Intranet service operated by BT Wholesale, a major employer at Crawley's City Place business zone. Metrobus Commercial Development Manager Nick Hill is currently talking to other companies in the zone about introducing similar services. (Most of these companies already pay Metrobus for their staff to have free travel to Gatwick Airport station, their nearest railhead, in a bid to discourage car-based commuting).

The OBUs also operate in-vehicle displays giving the time, route confirmation, and the name of the next stop. These can additionally carry messages - advising passengers, for example, of a closure of Gatwick Airport, due to a security alert, or of delays to local traffic resulting from congestion on the nearby M23. Metrobus sets these messages at its Crawley HQ, and can send them to at-stop displays as well as to buses via the ACIS system.

Analysis of the AVL data enables Metrobus to monitor early and late running and maintain intervals - if necessary, by bringing out an additional bus - and to revise timetables on the basis of recorded performance. The company has recently introduced ACIS BusNet Live, which pinpoints - at a workstation - bus locations at 30-second intervals on a tube map-style diagram, enabling it to compare the performance of scheduled services with those actually running.

Priority

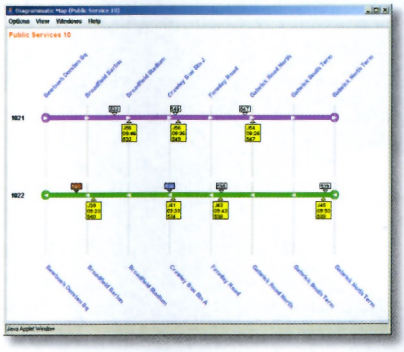
A further ITS-based aid to service performance is bus-triggered TSP at busy intersections. Using a series of GPS-derived 'virtual points', the OBU calculates the actual and timetabled locations of the buses.

If it detects late running, it triggers a digital PMR signal at a distance of 150m from upcoming traffic signals to their intersection control unit, to request priority over general traffic. Signals, operated in Horley by the Surrey NMIC and in Crawley by West Sussex County Council's Urban Traffic Control (UTC) Centre, are pre-programmed to evaluate TSP requests.

At most intersections, priority only operates if a bus is running behind schedule; although it is permanent at two of them because of local traffic conditions. At one, the busy Tushmore Roundabout on the A23, buses request signals on all approaches to turn red, allowing them to cut through traffic across the roundabout on a special bus-only lane.

TSP also operates at signal-controlled bus gates, and forms part of a package of electronic and physical measures introduced to speed up journey times. Others include 5.8km of conventional segregated bus lanes and 2.5km of guided busways. These take vehicles though delay-prone route sections in specially-designed bus-only channels, with TSP to ease them back into general traffic streams.

> "faster journey times have enabled Metrobus to upgrade the service to a fully 24-hour one"



The BusNet Live screen shows how well buses are succeeding in maintaining schedules

A further aid to service performance is a barrier system on a specially-built bus-only short cut which bridges a stream, between Crawley's Broadfield Stadium, the home of Crawley FC, and the Broadfield neighbourhood. Access is circuitous for general traffic, which is prevented from using the link by a rising bollard on a controlled carriageway used by services going in both directions.

The bollard lowers automatically when triggered by radio from the OBU on an oncoming bus. (A parallel relief carriageway blocks unauthorised vehicles with two normally-locked bollards, which drivers can lower manually for access if the automatic one fails). Fastway claims the radio-controlled bollard as a UK first.

Faster journey times resulting from these measures have enabled Metrobus to upgrade an initially 18-hour per day service to a fully 24-hour one. The company is currently arguing for more permanent TSP settings, to gain further journey-time improvements.

Passengers, in turn, can help cut boarding times by using the Metrobus website (*www.metrobus.co.uk*) to buy monthly Metrorider passes on-line. (The company is planning future quarterly and annual versions).

For Hill, Fastway is an unqualified success, with a March 2006 daily average passenger load of 7284 (up from 6291 in December 2005). It is, he says,

The Fastway Partnership

The Fastway Partnership brings together West Sussex and Surrey County Councils, and Crawley and Reigate & Banstead Borough Councils (an unusual non-metropolitan grouping of authorities for a transport initiative on this scale) with BAA Gatwick, British Airways (24% of whose flights use Gatwick), and service operator Metrobus and its Go-Ahead parent company.

The concept began with the 1996 first Crawley urban transport plan, which identified the need for radical improvement in local public transport provision in the town, and also recognised that its travel demands were closely linked with those of Gatwick Airport and Horley.

A 1997 feasibility study investigated options including trams, light rail and even revived trolleybuses before finally recommending a bus-based solution incorporating TSP and dedicated road space. The same year saw the birth of an initial partnership of the four local authorities to expand the UTP into an area wide Integrated Transport Plan (ITP), published in July 1998.

This later widened into a public-private partnership bringing in BAA, BA and Go-Ahead, as a provider of local rail services and parent company of Metrobus, the largest local bus operator. In December 2000, the government approved the scheme for funding under its new local transport plan (LTP) system, leading to a £19 million contribution.

Grounds for choosing the bus included cost-effectiveness (as compared particularly with a tramway), flexibility and speed of delivery, and minimal land take from existing roads. The partnership also saw it as offering greater penetration into residential areas by not relying on fixed infrastructure and power supplies.

Again, it would be possible to develop Fastway without needing special powers, using local authority partners' existing ones as planning and highway authorities. Finally, it would be more straightforward to extend into other towns.

running as a fully commercial operation on the original route10 from south-west Crawley to Gatwick (including the night service); while the subsequent route 20 runs commercially in West Sussex but is supported in Surrey.

Fastway has also contributed to a 33.3% increase in the number of peak-hour buses serving the Crawley town network since autumn 2003, when route 10 began operating. Not least, it is appreciated by staff. Says Hill: "Our drivers take pride in working on it."

Airport aims

One of the key drivers behind Fastway has always been a commitment by BAA Gatwick, in support of planning agreements with local authorities, to encourage its employees, and those of its contractors and airline customers, to commute to work by public transport rather than car. Around 30% of the Airport's workforce live in the Crawley/Horley area, and staff parking has been coming under increasing pressure.

BAA Gatwick has contributed £4 million (met partly from levies on airport parking) to the cost of Fastway. Transport Strategy Manager Bernard Ashley says staff appreciate the service - particularly with night buses covering all shifts - and the company encourages them to use it by offering a discounted monthly tickets. Airline crew and passengers have also been spotted among users, although the airport will not have exact figures until the completion of a pending survey.

By 2008, Ashley hopes that at least 20% of the 8000 locally-based airport staff will be using Fastway.

Where next?

The completed system is expected to carry 9,000 passengers a day by 2008. By this time, Metrobus anticipates that Fastway will have increased local peak-hour bus use by 60% and daily bus use by 29%, as well as taking out 1000 peak-hour car trips from roads in the Fastway corridor.

There are current plans to link the RTPI system with others in the area, while Surrey County Councillor Kay Hammond, a Fastway 'champion', has already outlined scope for similar services extending to Redhill, in Surrey, and East Grinstead, in West Sussex. (The latter would be in conjunction with projected new housing developments).

As the first initiative of its kind outside a major urban area, Fastway has also paved the way for similar groups of smaller urban or even semi-rural authorities to team up with major local employers and introduce schemes of their own.

Above: A route 10 service heading south from Gatwick Airport in a central guided busway on London Road, Crawley. Right: Close up of the small guide wheels

Guided busways

Guided busways – segregated, bus-only road sections – are designed to speed up buses past traffic queues in congested areas. Their concrete troughs, built a few mm wider than the standard bus width of 2550mm, contain two parallel running strips for bus wheels.

Flanking the tracks are raised kerbs, designed for small, horizontal tyred guide wheels to run against. Mounted on either side of front-wheel steering assemblies, these automatically guide the vehicle, removing the need to steer from the driver, who simply controls acceleration and braking and watches out for pedestrians crossing.

On approaching a guided busway section, the bus enters a 'funnel'. The physical construction bars it to other vehicles, making it automatically self-enforcing (unlike bus lanes). On Fastway, the guide wheels also allow the bus to nudge into raised pavement docking areas at major stops, for easier passenger access.

The world's first guided busway opened in Essen, Germany in 1980,

following development work by bus manufacturers Mercedes-Benz and MAN under a German Federal Government research programme. There followed the UK's first installations, in Birmingham (1984), and in Ipswich (Suffolk) and Leeds (West Yorkshire) in 1995.

Birmingham's did not survive bus deregulation, but it established the feasibility of UK operation and dry-ran key safety issues. Leeds and neighbouring Bradford now have a total of 6.1km of guided busway on three corridors.

Cambridgeshire County Council hopes to start work by end-2006 on a 40km route linking Cambridge and Huntingdon. Of this, 25km will consist of guided busways along a closed railway line.

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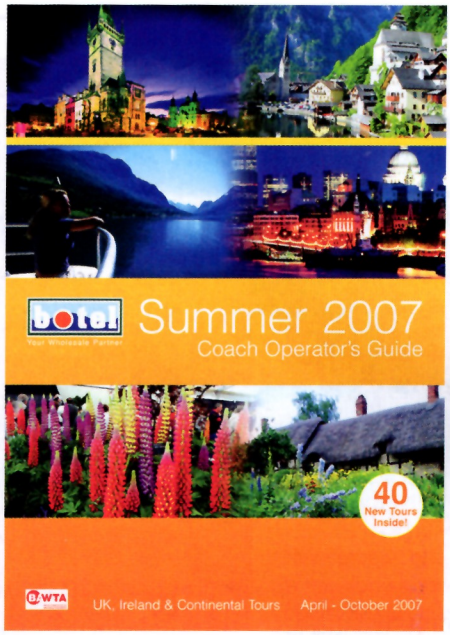

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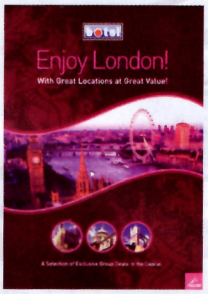

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Technologies blend in York's ftr

Futuristic system brings together a wide range of new technologies designed to improve the urban transport experience. David Crawford reports

Intelligent transport systems (ITS) technologies from both the industry and local authority sides of the bus world have meshed together to underpin York's new ftr service, which began running on May 8 (see *CBW* May 10, 2006). Local public transport users may, of course, have taken a while to appreciate the benefits after experiencing first-week problems over service intervals, ticketing and passenger information.

But Stuart Render of operator First is confident that the service will soon perform as expected, after some days of intensive behind-the-scenes activity. "It's a change in culture," he told *CBW*, "and we were perhaps pushing our luck a bit by bringing is so much that is new all at once."

Essentially, the ftr (text speak for 'future') concept represents a highly-imaginative step forward towards making bus travel smarter and so more passenger-friendly. The StreetCar vehicles plying York's busy route 4 - manufactured for operator First by Ballymena, Northern Ireland-based Wright Group - are, for example, the first to exhibit the new Wrightbus Telematics System (WTS) approach.

This is the outcome of a soon-to-be-formalised partnership between the Wright Group, public transport technology provider Advanced Communications and Information Systems (ACIS) and Belfast-based smart payment specialist Mobimatics. It is designed to manage all the on-board telematics systems - communications, real-time passenger information (RTPI) and remote payment systems - ›

Customers can purchase tickets via their mobile phones and then use the in-bus scanner to validate their 'text message ticket'

through a single integrated platform.

The WTS has emerged from the Wright Group's perception of the value of coordinating the procurement and installation of ITS equipment into the vehicle within the manufacturing process. Says Vice-President of Business Development Mark Nodder: "We can evaluate our customers' technology needs, develop a core 'black box' to provide these, and deliver it as an integral part of the bus, rather than it being a subsequent add-on.

"The ftr is our showcase, and we plan to put a lot of effort into developing the concept." Within the grouping, Wright Group acts as prime contractor and system integrator, with ACIS and Mobimatics as its chosen technology partners.

ACIS has developed York's Bus Location Information Sub-System (BLISS), which supports the city's real-time passenger information (RTPI) and traffic signal priority (TSP) operations. It enables a vehicle's on-board unit (OBU) to calculate bus position, using satellite-based location technology, delivers the resulting RTPI via at-stop passenger information points, on-board next-stop displays and the Internet, and requests priority at traffic signals if a service is running late.

The RTPI and TSP operate via the city's Bus Location Information Sub-System. This is a specialised component of the York Traffic Control Management System (TCMS), which the council has developed within the Department for Transport's Urban Traffic Control Management (UTMC) programme.

Set up in 1997 as a framework to encourage local authorities to introduce modern ITS technology to manage their road and public transport problems, UTMC emerged onto the streets in December 2002. York was the first of an initial four English local authorities selected by the Department for Transport (DfT) as UTMC pioneer to have its system up and running.

BLISS became a UTMC priority in 2003, reflecting the difficulty of improving journey times by physical means, such as the creation of bus lanes in the city's historic street network. The city was also one of 19 local authority areas that received DfT Supplementary Credit Approval funding for the introduction of RTPI schemes in cooperation with bus operators.

A successful pilot led to BLISS being rolled out across York's park-and-ride routes, starting with those at Rawcliffe Bar and Grimston Bar, which are run by First. BLISS also provides the operator with an overview of its vehicles' location at any given time.

On boarding they pass their phone screen with the text message displayed over a validator

Mobimatics' contribution to the WTS partnership is the fare payment system, which the company claims is a first for the UK. The ftrs have integral on-board self-service payment machines, designed by Mobimatics, which allow passengers to select their single or return ticket and pay cash - receiving in turn a specially bar-coded printed ticket.

The machine stands in a boarding area that Wrightbus has created behind the front wheel arches, to create more space for passengers. But they are being encouraged to pre-pay, to speed up throughput.

They can currently use around 50 PayPoints located in newsagents, convenience stores and supermarkets across the city, to buy weekly or four-weekly tickets, and will soon be able to use pre-payment panels being introduced into passenger information points. From mid-May, they will also be able to register their details at *www.goftr.com* for using their mobile phones to buy 'M' tickets, initially in carnets of 10. They receive these in the form of return text messages including barcoded images. On boarding, they pass their phone screen with the text message displayed over a validator on

Top left: the integrated system includes the introduction of new bus stops incorporating raised Kassel kerbs. Some also feature 'smart' passenger information points.
Left: The driver plays no part in the fare process. It's entirely automated. Wright Group is looking at introducing a second ticketing machine to speed up boarding.
Below: York's information boards incorporate live journey times

The futuristic looking ftrs reflect the introduction of a wide range of new technologies into York's historic streets

the on-board machine (as do holders of pre-printed tickets, eg for return journeys; a second validator is planned for installation to reduce queueing).

They can pre-set reminders for re-stocking. Revenue protection staff can check tickets using personal digital assistants (PDAs).

Wireless GPRS mobile data links relay fare transaction details back to Mobimatics' back office where, says the company's Chris Watt: "they can provide useful management information. We will, for example, be able to take advantage of usage data to suggest new ticketing types and services."

Mobimatics joined the WTS partnership in 2005 in response to Wrightbus' decision to source a hi-tech fare pre-payment solution for its new vehicle. One very important effect is that the driver - or 'pilot' in the terminology First has developed for the ftr - has no role in ticket issuing or checking (although there is a voice communications link for passengers with payment problems, which the pilot deals with when next stopping).

The pilot sits in a sealed, air-conditioned, tram-like module, with wide-area view of the surrounding environment, and an integrated control panel. This is designed to streamline activities including logging on at the start of a run, setting destination blinds and timetable and fare parameters, selecting images from any of the vehicle's eight on-board CCTV cameras, and reacting to any diagnostics alert.

The WRT partners and First are closely monitoring the performance of the ftr service - and rider feedback - with a view to developing further enhancements. These could include passenger counting - for security, anti-fraud and operational purposes - via sensors and records of ticket machine transactions - and links with engine management and chassis monitoring systems for better maintenance planning. (ACIS' Jamie Blissett points out that: "the ftrs are already pre-cabled for additional functions.")

To complement the ftr's technological features, York City Council has put in a range of infrastructural contributions. It has invested £1.3 million in street upgrades, including road resurfacing, smoothed-out junctions, off-street parking, and automatic traffic signal priority (TSP) at eight signalised intersections, in a bid to create clearer 'tram-style' runs for the ftrs.

York has invested £1.3 million in street upgrades, including road resurfacing and off-street parking

It has also upgraded ftr stops with raised Kassel kerbs, which have curved profiles to accommodate the tyres of buses docking closely into stops for improved passenger access. It has equipped three of these stops with 'smart' passenger information points supplied by urban digital Network specialist Cityspace, which carry real-time passenger information (RTPI) displays and touch screens for local information and will soon offer off-board payment.

Over the next year, the council plans to install more of these points in a slimmed-down version that Cityspace is currently developing. These will also offer off-board payment.

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ALBUM Conference – Engaging with the community

David Brown, managing director of Cardiff City Transport, set this year's agenda for the ALBUM Conference around 'engaging with the community' and the company hosted a well-attended and successful event on behalf of the association. Martin Cole reports...

Mike Cooper

ARRIVA UK REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Mike Cooper joined Arriva following a spell with one of the budget airline companies and posed the question: "What can public transport learn from low-cost airlines?"

Firstly, he turned the argument around and looked at the positives we already possess - such as strong people management skills, strong leadership, loyal followings, a social conscience, pride in our heritage, humility and a strong desire to improve and succeed.

Low-cost airlines, he argued had seen success because they had reinvented the industry and set a challenge to the status quo. They benefited from low unit costs and sought far greater utilisation of their aircraft than traditional airlines. They also operated on a multi-base network and had negotiated typical 20-30 year contractual deals with airports to secure routes and services.

Another perceived plus of low-cost airline operation is that point to point operation rather than hub and spoke-style flights causes less congestion at the major airports. The main carriers all tend to operate common fleets which are highly standardised and modern with a frequent replacement schedule to keep them as young as possible.

They provide minimum customer service - often seen as adequate in a no-frills environment - and it helps them maximise yield.

The major carriers have also built very strong brands which were quickly recognised across Europe.

Mr Cooper said managers should adopt a 'can do' attitude and be prepared to question the current norms in order to explore new avenues and opportunities. They should seek long and short term solutions to generating and sustaining growth - and make changes quickly.

He added that change required a lot of energy and hard work to implement but it often led to the ability to exploit the potential uncovered.

Mike Cooper

> "If real-time passenger information is employed – is it genuinely GPS-based and accurate?"
> Mike Cooper

Peter Jackson

MANAGING DIRECTOR – ADSEARCH

Peter Jackson said his company had been working with the public transport market since 1990 and for the last three years had worked closely with Cardiff City Transport in addition to doing timetable research for Welsh transport.

He said it was vitally important to passengers to be aware of where buses were going, and when, because research showed many waiting passengers wanted to get on the next bus whether it went where they were going or not.

This, he felt was because many people found it difficult to read timetable information effectively. Such a serious drawback highlighted the need for operators to engage with the passengers and the need to talk to passengers - which could be done on the services themselves - and to stimulate groups such as shoppers, bus users, non-users, workers, pensioners and children.

Peter Jackson

Information was key, but it had to clear. He asked "if real-time passenger information is employed - is it genuinely GPS-based and accurate, or does it just tell passengers when the next bus should be arriving?"

By talking extensively with existing and potential passengers, Mr Jackson said operators would uncover some very interesting observations. They would quickly discover how "tribal" certain groups were - such as buggy users and non-users, but on questioning people about their likes and dislikes they would find an extensive range of concerns encompassing passenger safety, payment safety, easy access, cleanliness, number of steps and flexibility of payment - such as not having the right change in one's pocket when the bus arrives - and why can't the driver change a fiver?

A recent survey conducted for Cardiff, pending the introduction of an innovative and high-profile project scheduled for the end of May, found general concerns as follows - in order of importance:

- Quality of service
- Price and payment methods
- Driver attitude
- Information
- Shelters
- Bus station

Mr Jackson's advice was to weed out all the most important factors, bring the customers into the process to gain a better understanding of their needs, instigate a regular monitoring system and invest in staff training. ›

Matthew Bradley

> All this was cause for concern and had led to the creation of an exclusive industry 'think-tank'
> Matthew Bradley

Matthew Bradley

MARKETING MANAGER, GO-AHEAD GROUP

Matthew Bradley said it was now almost 20 years since deregulation and it was clear there had been major changes in bus operation and the society it served. Near-full employment and increased part-time working opportunities, combined with 50 successive quarters of economic growth, a shrinking working class and a shift towards out-of-town shopping looked set to continue, all impacting on travel modes and requirements, he said.

All this was cause for concern and had led to the creation of an exclusive industry 'think-tank' known as the Ten Percent Club.

According to Mr Bradley, the Ten Percent Club membership consists of recognised innovators in senior management, from within Tfl, the PTEs and leading academics - all dedicated to expanding growth beyond the 10-12% norms of what is considered a successful operation. Formed in 2004 the club's aim is to 'get clever' about marketing growth and some of its members include the fresh-thinking and commercially astute, such as Roger French, Melvyn Hopwood, Ray Stenning, Nicola Tidy, David Alexander, Peter Wiltshire, Prof. Glen Lyons and publisher Peter Stoneham.

Members meet to consider a number of key issues and have brainstorming sessions to find the real roots of what customers want, determine if the right questions are being asked, the correct techniques employed and understood brand importance.

Over time, the conclusions of the club will be brought together in a marketing document and individual topics aired as papers for conference.

Top: Simon Posner. Above: Julia Cleverdon. Right: Lars Linden

Key points of discussions so far have revealed the importance of:

- the need to listen to speakers from leading agencies
- media planning
- a local product with a strong branding
- understanding today's trends
- economic forecasting
- overcoming negative attitudes to buses
- the attitudes of young people to a sustainable transport future, the 'green' argument and the carbon footprint
- changing the appearance and experience of the omnibus

Lars Linden

SCANIA

Scania's Lars Linden provided a break from the overriding conference theme to put over the manufacturers' views on future fuel and powertrains.

He pointed out the company had been trading for 115 years and achieved consistent growth, with a record year last year. It shared operator concerns over continued rises in oil prices and was striving to meet demands for reduced consumption - especially as long-term supplies were becoming uncertain. The company also had to deal with ever-tightening demands over vehicle emissions with Euro V limits set to come into force in 2009 and the prospective Euro VI limits liable to be enforced in 2012.

He said it was clear the EU wanted a lower dependence on oil and was pushing for more emphasis on biofuels and gaseous fuels.

> Scania would not consider introducing hybrid vehicles before the proposed Euro IV schedule begins
> Lars Linden

Top of Scania's list was bioethanol, a reliable liquid fuel available from renewable sources and blended with a 5% ignition improver. Trials and prolonged operation with ethanol-engined buses in Stockholm had already shown the viability was there, but he also acknowledged the possibilities for RME, also renewable, which functions as a 100% fuel source or can be successfully employed as a 5% mix with conventional fuels, as well as synthetic diesel derived from either fossil or renewable sources.

Gas in the form of methane could also be derived from fossil or renewable sources but Scania is not in favour of gas-powered buses, despite their low emission capability, because of the excessive additional bulk and weight the vehicles have to carry for on-board storage. Additionally, the engines have to revert to the Otto principle and reliance of spark plugs, typically resulting in far lower efficiency in energy conversion. He was also critical of the inconsistency of quality in bulk gas supply.

Mr Linden said Scania would not consider introducing hybrid vehicles before the proposed Euro VI schedule begins and when it did, it would concentrate on providing robust vehicles with robust engines which would deliver fuel savings of at least 25% through the use of energy storage storage in ultracapacitors.

Supplies of ethanol, he claimed, were now abundant - notably from Brazil, where the regime was already beginning to switch away from petrol or diesel.

Scania was now on its third generation of ethanol engine, having produced its first in 1916 when World War One made conventional fuel supplies to Sweden sporadic and uncertain. It built and tested its first ethanol bus in 1979 and in 1990 supplied 600, mainly to Sweden. Also, these vehicles require no exhaust after-treatment. Stockholm has reported huge reductions in NoX and particulate levels in its atmosphere. The principle downside of ethanol is its density: the vehicle uses some 65-70% more fuel than a diesel - so it needs roughly double the capacity in storage tanks to complete a day's work without a refill. Another point to watch is the fuel system needs more regular maintenance because the fuel affects gasket and seals much more aggressively than diesel.

Clockwise from top left: Chief Superintendent Robert Evens, Andrew Davies, Noreen Bray.

Standing foursquare behind Scania's decision to pursue EGR principles on its Euro IV and V engines, Mr Linden posed a very interesting statement, one I certainly hadn't heard before. He claimed no-one using SCR techniques could hope to achieve perceived Euro 6 emissions levels. "It's just not possible," he said.

Andrew Davies AM

LABOUR, SWANSEA WEST. MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE, INNOVATION AND NETWORKS

Andrew Davies spoke on the Wales Transport Strategy which he said was bringing about transformation in the country. With much of the traditional coal and steel industry having disappeared, Wales was now going through a revival with a modern, diverse economy emerging - and transport playing a very strong part in it.

He said that as employment had increased, traffic volumes had risen correspondingly, and the Assembly recognised there was a need to build on improvements and had therefore sanctioned an £8 billion programme, over five years, to develop an integrated transport scheme.

Although the bulk of this was being absorbed by reviving and strengthening rail services, funds had been made available to develop airport link services and it was already clear pensioners and disabled passengers were making full use of concessionary fares schemes - to the extent that bus use decline had been arrested.

> "Police have also been encouraged to use public transport... as [it] often prevents misbehaviour"
> Bob Evans

There was also continued support for community transport schemes and plans to introduce half-fare ridership for 16-18 year-olds.

He also acknowledged a major investment in bus operations, such as the support for Cardiff City Transport to develop its services - the details of which are embargoed until May 24.

He said four regional consortia had been created to administer the transport plans of the 22 Welsh local authorities - which would aid co-ordination and integration when implementing their strategies. He said he was mindful of the need to develop sustainable solutions and was keen to work with all stakeholders to implement strategies that would benefit transport services in the country as a whole.

Robert Evans

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT. DIVISIONAL COMMANDER FOR CARDIFF

Chief superintendent Bob Evans said it was his aim to see safe buses operating in a safe city. He had a vision to make Cardiff the safest city in the UK - in a bid to encourage incoming investment, more employment and better facilities. Brought to its simplest terms, he said: "We just have to nick the bad guys."

The city, he said was facing new challenges, particularly from the Millennium Stadium, which periodically meant there were extremely large influxes of people into the city - on top of an already busy workload which led to 40,000 crimes or calls for assistance per year.

To support local bus operation the police entered into the Cardiff Bus Safe Partnership in 2003 which has continually evolved its approach to tackling antisocial behaviour on the public transport.

This included developing rapid response units to deal with incidents on buses and the instigation of Operation Cobra, which saw all drivers issued with DNA testing kits in the event of being spat upon. This had a positive result in that many offenders had been identified through the process but with added benefits in that unrelated crimes had also been solved as the DNA samples had allowed police to identify rapists and murderers whose whereabouts had previously eluded them - some cases as long as 15 years.

Police have also been encouraged to use public transport as a uniformed presence aboard the vehicle often prevents any misbehaviour. It has also led to the immediate apprehension of youths throwing missiles at buses - as they can be captured red-handed.

Other speakers at the event included: Julia Cleverdon CVO, CBE, chief executive of Business in the Community, who spoke of the need to underpin the bottom line, good business behaviour and the need to work with communities, both business and public; Noreen Bray MBE, who spoke of the need for good communication with the travelling public and through public relations; Simon Posner, deputy DG – CPT UK, who spoke of the effects and progress to date of CPT's On the Move campaign and its success with the media and Department for Transport; John Owen, recently retired MD of Thamesdown Transport and now chairman of the UK Bus Awards, who urged ALBUM members to take advantage of the extended period for getting entries in and submit their successes or innovations before the end of May. The event was concluded by Chris Irwin, chairman of the South West Public Transport Users, who put the case for the passengers.

NISSAN PRIMASTAR

A star is born

Nissan's Primastar is a newcomer to the minibus market, but borrowing heavily from parent company Renault and LCV partner Vauxhall has resulted in a comfortable and compact PCV

By Steve Walker

In relative terms, Nissan is a newcomer to the UK minibus market but if the brand's swift rise to prominence in the light van sector is any indication, it's a name that operators will be hearing plenty more of in the future. Currently, there's one solitary Nissan PCV for buyers to mull over and it's the model we examine here, the nine-seater Primastar dCi 100 minibus.

The Nissan path to light commercial vehicle prominence is one that's bound to provoke the odd twinge of jealousy among rival manufacturers. The Japanese firm neatly sidestepped the expensive research and development stages and opted out of tricky groundwork involved in gaining market recognition for an LCV product. Instead, they simply requisitioned a ready-made and highly competitive range of light vans from parent company Renault.

Renault in turn have an LCV alliance with Vauxhall, so the Nissan Primastar panel van, which forms the basis of this Primastar minibus, is available badged as a Renault Trafic and a Vauxhall Vivaro. To complicate matters further, both Renault and Vauxhall also offer largely identical nine-seat minibus versions as well.

The market

Nissan launched the Primastar panel van in 2002, a year after Renault and Vauxhall brought their respective Trafic and Vivaro products to market. The Primastar minibus, however, is a more recent addition to the line-up. Announced in the later stages of 2005, the vehicle competes at the bottom end of the minibus market size-wise with its nine-seat capacity, but what it lacks in space, it tries to make up for in style.

As you would imagine, the manufacturer has very definite ideas on the target market for its product. Larger families, construction companies, schools, colleges, taxi and chauffeur companies and the police and emergency services, were all

Ideal for urban areas – and less than £20,000 on the road

listed as likely destinations for Primastar Minibuses at the time of the model's launch. The stated aim is for the Nissan to claim 5% of the UK minibus market in this Primastar's first year and to help achieve this, it's being offered at prices starting from £19,680 on the road.

Aside from the obvious competition from the Vivaro and Trafic equivalents, the Primastar must also do battle with the likes of Volkswagen's Transporter Shuttle and the Mercedes Vito Traveliner. There isn't a great deal to separate these contenders on price, but the Primastar's range is limited to a single engine option and two trim levels, whereas both Volkswagen and the Mercedes offer extensive mix-and-match potential with their products. Even Vauxhall. with a long wheelbase 12-seater version of the Vivaro, and Renault with a pair of gross vehicle weight options, outdo Nissan when it comes to offering customers choice.

The product

Our Primastar minibus test vehicle arrived looking the part with black bodywork and tinted windows. It featured up-market SE trim and had the optional satellite navigation system fitted. Equipment on the SE runs to a CD stereo, electric front windows, heated mirrors and the Nissan RPS Rear Park System. It's a package of extras that seems worth the £500 premium over the entry-level E model - although these are, arguably, non-essential features. The standard specification of ABS with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution, three-point seatbelts for all nine seats, a driver's airbag, an alarm, immobiliser and remote central locking covers the key safety and security bases quite adequately.

The minibus is based on the short-wheelbase, low roof Primastar panel van and has a 2.9-tonne gross vehicle weight. It's relatively compact by minibus standards, measuring in just under 4.8m long and 1.9m wide. The modest unladen height of 1.96m means that you can even park it in some height-restricted car parks.

Were it not for the existence of its Renault and Vauxhall badged brethren, you'd have to mark the Primastar down as the most distinctive small minibus on the market. As it is, it's still in the top three. The design that looked groundbreaking in 2002 has aged well and still appears modern despite the sheer number of Primastar, Vivaro and Trafic vans currently on the road.

The oversize front bumper, the large teardrop headlamps and the unique hump in the roofline over the cab all hang together to attractive effect. The rounded lines around the front end contrast with a rear-end squared off to maximize interior space. The huge tailgate - just about the biggest you'll find on any production vehicle - is framed by angular light clusters running vertically up the Primastar's corner edges.

The practicalities

The Primastar's interior is laid-out in three rows of three seats with the nine-occupant capacity made up of driver and two ›

NISSAN PRIMASTAR

Access to rear seats is via tipping nearside second-row seat only

passengers in the front row then two rows of three behind. The vehicle lacks the airy feel in the saloon area that you get with a coach-built model or a conversion from one of the larger panel vans. The low roof is the main contributing factor to this but there's still adequate headroom even for very tall passengers and the same goes for legroom - with one notable exception.

In the front, legroom for the middle passenger is severely restricted by the dashboard bulge that accommodates the gear lever. The seat is suitable for a child or even an adult of moderate height on short journeys, but longer trips will be best undertaken with only seven passengers on board.

Despite the presence of wide-opening sliding doors on each of the Primastar's flanks, the third row is only accessible from the nearside as only the left-hand seat in the second row can be flipped forward. The seats themselves are comfortable, if a little over-soft - the driver's seat in particular not really providing the firm support you want during a long period behind the wheel.

Elsewhere in the cab area, the dash is very commercial vehicle - toughly built with robust plastics, but lacking the finesse of some rivals. Chunky cup holders and large door pockets give useful storage capacity, but cubby holes down to the right of the wheel are too shallow, allowing items to fall out. There's a handy shelf below the wheel for a road atlas or similar, though.

The limited dimensions of the Primastar minibus make themselves felt again when it comes to luggage space. There's 1.24m3 of room on the padded load floor behind the rear bench and that's not a lot when you've got eight or nine occupants each with a king-size suitcase in tow.

One solution would be to pay the taxi fare for three of your party and utilise the folding rear bench. Here, the seatbacks can be folded down then the whole bench tumbled forward. The available space is increased to 2.49m3 and you've still got space for six passengers. Actually folding the third row is a simple if rather hefty operation but the solid-feeling mechanism does inspire confidence that it will stand up to sustained use and all the time, that enormous tailgate is suspended overhead shielding you from the elements.

The drive

Get behind the wheel of the Primastar minibus and it really starts to shine in comparison to larger, less wieldy rivals. The 100bhp 1.9-litre dCi common-rail diesel engine pours on its power in a smooth and progressive fashion with a level of refinement that shouldn't unduly disturb passengers. It's not the most powerful engine you'll come across in this class of minibus and operators who plan on running fully-loaded for a good proportion of the time may prefer something with more muscle. There's a 240Nm maximum torque output available at 2,000rpm, though, which is enough to get the vehicle smartly off the line and up to speed. Nissan claims a 37mpg average fuel economy figure that improves to 41mpg on longer trips.

The Primastar rides on independent McPherson struts on the front with a torsion beam axle at the rear. It's a typical light commercial vehicle set-up, but the ride quality is surprisingly good. The suspension stays compliant, ironing out small imperfections in the road surface with ease and tackling speed-humps without catapulting rear seat occupants into the headlining or the need to slow to a crawl. Motorway cruising is a pleasant experience and only severe B-road ruts and potholes remind you of the vehicle's light van origins. Front and rear anti-roll bars help the Primastar stay flat in the corners and disc brakes on all four wheels produce reassuring stopping power.

The driving position itself is more akin to that of a large MPV than a panel van. The steering wheel is mounted in an upright position and the driver's seat adjusts in three

Distinctive exterior lines, but inside the dash area lacks finesse. Folding the solid-feeling rear seats forward is a simple operation

directions so most people will be able to get comfortable. The large side mirrors give a decent view down the flanks and you get a great field of vision at the front with no bonnet to speak of, but you're only likely to see the grinning faces of your passengers in the rear-view mirror. This is rarely a problem, however. Thanks to the Primastar's modest size, tight 11.8m kerb-to-kerb turning circle and rear parking sensors, tricky manoeuvres become a breeze.

The verdict

One of the smallest nine-seat minibuses on the market, size is the Nissan Primastar's biggest strength and its biggest weakness. Some operators will be put off by the limited luggage space, others by the nine-seat capacity that effectively becomes eight seats thanks to the front row's restricted middle berth. The cabin is solidly built and extremely practical, but lacks the quality feel of some rivals.

The driving experience, on the other hand, is first-class with an accomplished engine that delivers strong fuel economy, impressive refinement and reasonable performance given its modest power output.

The Primastar minibus is a strikingly-styled vehicle that will appeal to image-conscious companies - particularly those who operate in congested urban areas where the Primastar's manoeuvrability and compact dimensions truly come into their own.

FACT FILE

Base Vehicle Nissan Primastar SWB panel van
Seating Driver + 8 passengers
Dimensions length/width/heightmm 4782/1904/1965
Gross Vehicle Weight 2,900kg
Standard Safety Features 3-point seatbelts, driver's airbag, ABS with EBD
Warranty 3-year/60,000-mile inc 3-year roadside assistance
Engine dCi common-rail direct injection diesel
Max Power 100bhp @ 3,500rpm
Max Torque 250Nm @ 2000rpm
Top Speed 97mph
Fuel Economy 30.4 (urban), 41.5 (extra urban), 36.7 (combined)
Gearbox 6-speed manual
Contact Nissan Motor (GB) Limited. www.nissan-lcv.co.uk

VERDICT

Who's it for?
Companies who need to carry eight passengers with limited luggage, especially in congested urban areas.
Any alternatives?
Mercedes-Benz Vito Traveliner, Volkswagen Transporter Shuttle, Renault Trafic Minibus, Vauxhall Vivaro Minibus.

- ☺ Driving dynamics
- ☺ Manoeuvrability
- ☺ Styling
- ☹ Luggage space
- ☹ Seating capacity
- ☹ Limited choice

The Bottom Line
An attractive, compact minibus that's good to drive - ideal for operators who value handling and comfort over sheer carrying capacity.

London Bus BTEC – the lessons

Training agency Tangerine says the new driver CPC may not be the problem it seems to be. Midlands business director Steve Morison says we only need to look to the London BTEC scheme to see the pros - and cons

The thought of having to train established drivers every five years to maintain their Drivers' CPC is quite daunting and for some quite inconceivable.

However we can learn from the experience of London Bus operators, who have had to train all their drivers to BTEC Intermediate standards. After its introduction in 2002, London Buses soon set the target for all established drivers to hold a BTEC Intermediate Award in Delivering a Bus Service in London by the end of 2005, and newly qualified drivers within 12 months of entering service.

The purpose of the BTEC qualification was, and still is, to provide a sound foundation of knowledge and understanding for PCV licence holders employed within the Transport for London bus network area, and to improve and maintain the standards demanded of the people who provide the service at the point of delivery.

The BTEC training and qualification process will not be that dissimilar to the training required for the Drivers' CPC. It covers five units:

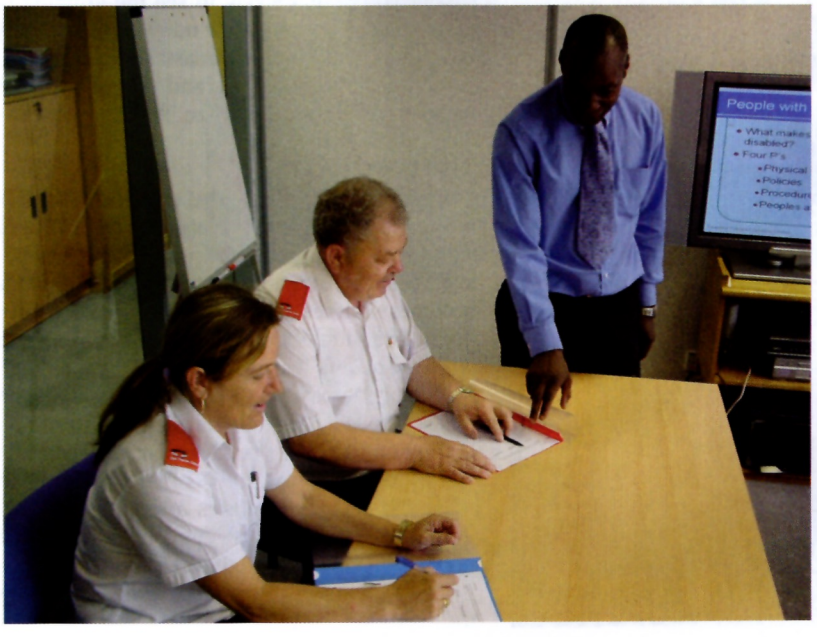
- Introduction to the Bus Industry
- Operating the Bus Service
- Health
- Safety and Security
- Driving Skills and Working with Others

The Working with Others unit also includes a Disability and Diversity session, a vital session in today's environment and one that from driver feedback is most positive. There is also a requirement to pass an in-service driving assessment.

Initially some operators viewed the prospect of releasing drivers for formal off-the-job training as a needless burden on their limited resources. And it's fair to say that as London Buses was funding the training it wasn't the financial liability that the Drivers' CPC will become.

Like the CPC, the BTEC required training centres to be approved and instructors to be trained. Unlike

"The purpose of the BTEC qualification was, and still is, to provide a sound foundation of knowledge and understanding for PCV licence holders"



The London Bus experience of BTEC should be a pointer to the benefits and method of driver CPC training

an NVQ qualification, the BTEC qualification is focused on quality training and assessment at the point of training, which is a far more manageable concept for our industry. As well as financial support, London Buses gave practical advice and encouraged operators to share their best practices.

Initially it was felt that large operators would undertake BTEC training in-house and smaller operators would use independent training companies. Conversely, two of the big six took the view that they would concentrate on initial driver training and would work in partnership with Tangerine to deliver BTEC and other driver development training initiatives. This partnership gave the operator the benefit of fixing the cost of training up front and to be confident that drivers were being trained by dedicated professional trainers.

Tangerine also undertook all their in-service driving assessments covertly. Other smaller operators took the advantage of Tangerine's and other independent training provider services. To date Tangerine has trained and assessed nearly a third of the London Bus Network's drivers.

With a positive approach, most drivers' attitudes change and they appreciate the experience of learning

So what lessons can we learn from the London experience?

Generally, experienced drivers are apprehensive about training. They tend to take the view that they don't need training due to their experience.

With a positive approach from managers and the skills of the trainer, most attitudes change. Drivers appreciate that we never stop learning and that we have a part to play in passing on our own experience and knowledge to others. Despite their experience many drivers know little about the operating problems and the commercial issues of running a bus or coach operation. Understanding others' problems helps to form a team.

Quality training has a positive effect and adds value to the business:

- It reduces accidents by improving drivers' hazard perception, scanning skills and, importantly, driver attitude.
- It improves customer satisfaction by improving the comfort of the journey; by drivers understanding the need for a reliable service and how to achieve it.
- It reduces driver stress by demonstrating you can maintain progress without the use of excessive inappropriate speed, and that by being polite but assertive you can avoid confrontation.
- It also demonstrates that drivers are valued by the operator.

Trainers need to be passionate and professional. They require ongoing training and development to ensure that they deliver upbeat and effective courses.

In-house training is not necessarily the most cost-effective or efficient training solution. By working with quality independent training providers, company principles and policies can be maintained and training can be delivered at a fixed price as and when required.

The administration and the organising of releasing drivers and keeping up-to-date records of who has been trained, what has been covered, and who requires training is no easy task. Systems need to be robust.

Given that there are far more small operators outside London, and in-house training is not necessarily the option for all large operators, independent trainers should be more involved in the formation of the training syllabus and the implementation of the Drivers' CPC. By sharing experiences, best practice and operating in a transparent way all benefit.

The most important issue is ensuring that training is effective, otherwise it is not worth doing. There needs to be clear systems in place to monitor and establish what the driving and service standards are before any training initiative, and what the standards are afterwards. As established drivers will not be required to undertake any formal assessment after their CPC training this is even more vital.

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AWARD FOR TRANSPORT CCTV INNOVATOR

AD Group – parent company of Dedicated Micros – has received the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise (Innovation category) for its advanced TransVu system which is helping to tackle crime on PSVs.

The compact TransVu is a sophisticated multi-camera digital CCTV recorder which can be fitted to a wide range of vehicles including buses, trains, taxis, vans and HGVs.

Its key feature is total network integration, automatically downloading images and incidents, eliminating the need for time consuming manual archiving.

Status reporting immediately highlights any tampering with the system, such as masking cameras, and also assuring operators that the system is always fully functional. GPS capability allows the vehicle to report its position immediately to base, while intelligent power management controls system operation without intervention by a driver.

Said AD Group's CEO Mike Newton: "The Queen's Award is a great honour for AD Group and we are particularly delighted that it reflects our position as a real pioneer in the CCTV industry. Our business thrives by being ahead of the competition, when we innovate – with TransVu being a prime example – it's not simply by adding a bell or whistle to a box but by introducing something genuinely new."

TransVu has already been applied with impressive results in a wide range of applications, worldwide. Large bus operators have used TransVu to identify fraudulent compensation claims, with an internal inertia circuit constantly logging acceleration, braking and turning of the vehicle, providing a vital audit trail should the vehicle be involved in an accident.

AD Group is also looking to the future with a new variant, TransVu Media, which allows advertising to be provided, on the move, to a commercially-attractive audience. When the unit is installed in a bus, it can feed on-board display screens with stored advertising messages, together with travel information, while simultaneously recording CCTV images from inside the cabin.

■ For more information on TransVu please contact Jeff Berg on tel: 08705 736482 email: jberg@ad-holdings.co.uk.

KNORR-BREMSE CHANGES AT THE TOP

Dr Ing Raimund Klinkner, currently deputy chairman of Gildemeister AG in Bielefeld, Germany, is to join the executive board of vehicle component manufacturer Knorr-Bremse AG on January 1, 2007, where he will be responsible for the Commercial Vehicle Systems division and thus for the group's worldwide activities in this sector.

On April 1, 2007, Dr Klinkner will take over as chairman, succeeding Heinz Hermann Thiele who will be joining the supervisory board, where he will continue to steward and support the ongoing development of the company.

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ELECTRONIC DIPSTICK SENDS FUEL FIGURES ON-LINE

Engineering specialist Vectec Ltd has launched an on-line system to help operators remotely manage fuel and meet legislation set out by the Environment Agency Document PPG7.

"This level of recording precision and sophistication of hardware is common on petrol forecourts where the primary purpose of the business is to resell the fuel and that fuel is perceived as being far more hazardous because of its explosive nature," said Vectec's managing director, Simon Fowler.

"There have been statutory regulations covering the storage of petrol since 1928. But in the commercial world, where bent dipsticks or sticky contents gauges are used to measure the fuel level, it is hard to see how these precise reconciliations are going to occur. Additionally, Health and Safety regulations forbid employees from climbing on top of tanks or reaching down onto manhole chambers to take tank contents readings."

Vectec installs a sensitive level-measuring probe in a storage tank and links that probe to an office-based device. This equipment takes a tank stock reading every hour and transfers the information to a website on a daily basis. In addition to the hourly readings, the system provides low-level warning alarms via email or SMS.

The Groundwater Protection Code has placed a duty of care on companies that store fuel in underground tanks to employ an effective wet stock management system. The PPG7 extends this requirement to all fuelling facilities. where product pipes run below ground. The requirement for such record keeping can be mitigated, but not necessarily replaced, by an automatic leak detection system in conjunction with double containment.

A typical single tank system costs less that £1,250 installed with a £60 per tank per annum charge for access to the website. Systems can also be rented.

■ Further information can be found at www.vectec.co.uk

21ST CENTURY CCTV SYSTEM WITH WIFI DOWNLOAD

Automatic CCTV video downloads as your vehicles enter the depot sounds like the stuff of science fiction – but this capability, via WiFi, is available now.

21st Century, which claims to be the only company in the UK with a proven WiFi system, has just installed its 2,000th system.

Paul Rogers, 21st Century director of sales and marketing, says: "Maintaining systems manually involves many man hours and makes the whole thing expensive to run. Our Wi-Fi system ensures vehicle downtime is reduced to an absolute minimum, and costs are further reduced because problems are quickly and efficiently identified."

The system can cover fleets from 50 to 500 vehicles. 21st Century also offers a remote monitoring service called Heartbeat, which detects vandalism and obscured views.

■ For more details: *www.cctv-uk.com*

FLEXIBLE FINANCE IS HERE, SAYS BROAD OAK

An independent finance broker says the end is nigh for the restrictive finance deals which have been available for bus and coaches .

Broad Oak Asset Finance says most finance providers demanded the VAT on the day of purchase, plus a minimum 10% deposit. This caused real cash flow problems particularly for owner drivers, or those coach company's looking for rapid expansion.

"The finance market has become more competitive which has forced lenders to tailor their offerings to the needs of the coach company, rather than offer a single finance product to fit all," said Broad Oak's Mark Burgess. "This is great news for the industry. Finance companies are increasingly requiring lower deposits; some company's will even fund the VAT across the life of the agreement.

"Rather than offer the traditional 12 equal monthly instalments per year, finance companies are increasingly offering finance packages tailored to the cash flows of the coach company with no payments due in the quieter months, typically January – April, and with higher payments to compensate during the busy summer months. Some providers are even offering a 6- or 12-month deferred period with no deposit, so in other words nothing to pay for the first 6 or 12 months.

Burgess commented: "The industry has become more competitive and the finance companies who succeed will be those who listen to their customers needs and respond with flexible finance packages tailored to each clients individual needs."

Andrew Pearce, director of Wire³, thanks Paul Kuske of PK Commercial Tyres

WIRE3 OFFERS BESPOKE TRACKING

Sat³ from Wire³, UK-based specialist in complete mobile workforce management systems, is a flexible, scalable vehicle tracking solution.

Ranging from basic vehicle tracking systems to complete performance monitoring and operational maximisation solutions, operators can specify a Sat³ system that will grow and develop with their organisation.

Sat³ systems are based on GPRS blackbox modem technology, collecting data as frequently as every two minutes from vehicles, wherever they are across Europe, and presenting the information in manually initiated or auto-run reports, with standard or bespoke formats to suit individual client needs.

Compatible with the majority of scheduling applications, Sat³ offers increased productivity via efficient route planning and improved vehicle utilisation. It also helps to improve customer service through better scheduling and timekeeping and enhanced delivery data.

Sat³ also helps reduce overtime costs and maximise fuel utilisation through better management of resources and reduces insurance premiums by providing real-time tracking of stolen vehicles.

With no capital outlay, fixed ongoing costs and future-proofing, plus specialist vehicle installation, UK & European mapping and comprehensive training and ongoing support, Sat³ systems help today's busy fleet operators maximise assets and control costs.

■ Contact Wire³ on 0208 893 9927 or via www.wire3-t.co.uk

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DENNIS DART SLF **PLAXTON POINTER**

Dennis Dart hits the target

Three-quarters of a million miles on – and it's still a favourite with the passengers

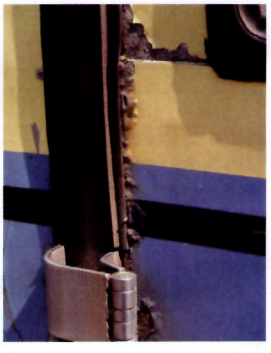
Operator's comments: We've had this vehicle since new and despite some niggling problems and quirks, it has been a solid workhorse, now with almost 3/4 million kilometres on the clock. Bought to serve our Newark-Tuxford service, it travels potholed lanes and roads every day, and needs to be tough. We had early problems with leaks, which were solved, and when low-sulphur diesel was first introduced it 'ate' fuel pumps (though recent pumps seems to be lasting). It still has a rattly door. It's been a no-start a few times due to the poor design of the emergency stop switch and solenoid.

We did an engine rebuild in 2004, and when we replaced the front road springs this spring we replaced the air bags despite the fact that they had never leaked.

Passengers love it, and when it is upgraded with a 12-metre Tempo this month, it will go for a complete re-panel and retrim, and we'll keep it another five years or so as a back-up vehicle. The Dennis service we have had from Peter Graham has been outstanding.

If we didn't need the extra capacity of the Tempo, we'd be looking at replacing it with Plaxton Centro, Wrightbus Cadet SB120 or the ADL Enviro 200

Driver comment: This vehicle is easy to drive with a good cab area. Due to the door behind ahead of the front wheels, pulling tight to kerbs is easier than in our Optare Solo with the door behind. Passengers love it, and will even let other buses pass to catch it.



Above left: Passengers love the bus. Above: Corrosion on the emergency door jamb will be addressed with repanelling. Left: Some minor corrosion. Below: Wrap-around ad gives a modern look

FACT FILE

Chassis Dennis Dart SLF
Body Plaxton Pointer 10.7m
First registered November 1998
Owner Marshalls of Sutton-on-Trent
Since November 1998
Paid £82,000
Major modifications None
Current mileage/km 719,012km
Mileage in current ownership 719,012km

PROS & CONS

Costs last 12 months:
Total Not available
Service interval Four weeks (inspection)
Major bills (over £100) Recon gearbox, two front air bags, power steering box, two front springs
Average mpg 9.3 mpg
Breakdowns Yes (see Operator's comments)

- ☺ Drivers love the vehicle
- ☺ Very manoeuvrable
- ☹ Rattly door
- ☹ Water ingress (now solved)
- ☹ Fuel and water filler too close
- ☹ Early fuel pumps

Current condition

Panels and bodywork
★★★★★
Panel corrosion

Seats and flooring
★★★★★
Both excellent with no fade

Driver area
★★★★★
Well-liked by drivers

Engine and gearbox
★★★★★
Good for the mileage

Key

- ☺ Positive points
- ☹ Negative points

- ★★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Very good
- ★★★★★ Good
- ★★★★★ Poor
- ★★★★★ Very poor

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

FERRIS HOLIDAYS

Ranking among the biggest operators of double-deck coaches, Ferris Holidays knows what it's looking for.

The Cardiff operator is confident it has the elite in coach travel, following delivery of four luxurious Volvo double-decks, which will be used exclusively on Ferris' holidays to France and Spain.

The Berkhof-bodied tri-axle B12Bs are 14.75m long, making them among the longest coaches on the road. All feature Volvo's DH12D 420bhp engine coupled to an I-Shift gearbox and boast interiors which easily match up to the eye-catching exterior.

As well as full climate control, TV/DVD player, toilet and hot and cold drinks facilities, passengers can even take advantage of on-board smoking rooms. And although the B12Bs could accommodate 83 passengers, each vehicle is fitted with just 70 seats for ample leg room and greater comfort.

Managing director Jason Ferris commented: "We took two Volvo double decks last year and know that they can provide the capacity and economy we need. And as far as comfort is concerned, passengers who travel with us can be assured that they are experiencing the very best in coach travel."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Berkhof Axial 100
Engine Volvo DH12D 420bhp
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 70
Spec Climate control, DVD, hot/cold drinks, smoking compartment
Supplied by Volvo Bus, 01926 401777

FITZCHARLES COACHES

Fitzcharles Coaches of Grangemouth in Stirlingshire has plumped for its first semi-autos with delivery of two Volvo B12Bs for use on its European touring programme.

The Sunsundegui Siderals, which feature a Volvo 420bhp engine coupled to a Volvo I-Shift gearbox, have been selected as part of a plan to upgrade the 16-strong fleet. Ideally suited for Continental touring, they feature full climate control, 49 Esteban Club seats, toilet, TV/DVD and CD player and hot and cold drinks facilities. They will be in use throughout the season on touring holidays to France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria.

Managing director Ronnie Fitzcharles says that reliability and quality were the key considerations in their choice: "We want our passengers to travel quickly, safely and in comfort," he explained. "And we feel that the B12B's rigid frame, smooth air suspension and independent front suspension contributes to that high level of comfort, while the I-Shift gearbox, which is new to us, will further improve the smoothness of the journey.

"The fact is that people who are taking our European holidays quite rightly expect to travel in complete comfort. We have to deliver that and we are confident that these coaches are the right ones for the task."

Family run Fitzcharles Coaches started out as a bicycle shop in Grangemouth in 1929. Over the years the company has diversified into taxi and coach hire but still sells and repairs cycles as well as operating the touring coach fleet.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/ Sunsundegui Sideral
Engine Volvo DH12D 420bhp
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 49
Spec Climate control, DVD, hot/cold drinks, Esteban Club seats
Supplied by Volvo Bus, 01926 401777

ARRIVA THE SHIRES

Four more Optare Solos have been introduced by Arriva the Shires for a daytime local circular service in Harlow.

The result is that, along with seven Solos already in operation out of the company's Harlow depot, lowfloor buses now meet most of their local services.

General Manager at Arriva the Shires, Paul Woolmore, says that the Solos have been very well received by passengers, drivers and his engineering staff.

"Older people in particular find them a very friendly bus to use," he says.

The Solos are being used on the high-frequency number 8 service that connects local housing estates around Harlow with the town centre. There's ample power, as Arriva the Shires specified the 185 bhp Cummins ISBe engine, which is well matched to the Allison 2000 automatic transmission to ensure smooth starts.

"We chose to standardise on the Cummins because we think it's a very robust engine that will deliver a long and trouble-free life," says Paul Woolmore.

"Our engineers are very familiar with this engine and they also like the ease with which you can carry out work on the other major running units in Solo. Everything is very accessible and Optare has clearly considered both the routine maintenance and major overhaul aspects when designing this model."

The four new Solos are 2.5m wide and 9.5m in length and are fitted with 30 Esteban Civic V2 seats and three tip-ups in the wheelchair bay.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Solo integral
Engine Cummins ISBe 185 bhp
Transmission Allison 2000
Seats 33
Spec Isringhausen air-suspended driver seat, Hanover LED destination displays
Supplied by Optare, 01113 264 5182

Pope leads capital transport challenge

Geoff Pope AM has been appointed as the new Chairman of the London Assembly's Transport Committee.

The Committee is the only elected body providing independent monitoring of Ken Livingstone's transport policy. As well as scrutinising the billions the Mayor spends on services, the Committee will focus on new ways to improve bus, Tube, train and river services for Londoners and commuters. The watchdog will also keep a close eye on transport plans for the 2012 Olympics, congestion and the Congestion Charge.

The Committee will hold numerous public meetings at City Hall, questioning the capital's key transport chiefs and stakeholders during the year ahead. Mr Pope succeeds Roger Evans, who is now the Committee's Deputy Chair.

Geoff Pope said: "My colleagues and I will strive to get London the modern and efficient transport system it deserves. We will question the Mayor and his transport chiefs about their proposals to ensure they deliver what the capital needs."

Geoff Pope joined the London Assembly in 2005, he is a member of the Liberal Democrats. During his time as Deputy Chair of the Assembly's Transport Committee, Geoff led an investigation to improve services and passengers' journeys on the North London Line.

His other responsibilities at the Assembly include sitting on the Health and Public Services, and the Standards Committees He is also a member of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

Geoff Pope was born in Islington and now lives in Twickenham. He is a management consultant in the Voluntary Sector. Geoff was Mayor of Richmond Upon Thames in 1989-90. He also spearheaded a petition to improve the 267 bus service from Twickenham to West Middlesex Hospital.

CFO leaves Scania

Jan Gurander, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Scania has decided to leave his position within the group.

Jan Gurander was employed by Scania in 1995 as head of the Treasury. He was recruited from a similar position with Investor AB. In 1998, he was appointed finance director at Scania.

In 2000 he left Scania for the position of CEO & President of Business Unit Finance within Volvo where he stayed for a year. In 2001 he was appointed CFO and member of the Executive Board of Scania.

"Jan Gurander has contributed to the positive development of Scania for many years. Therefore, I can only regret that he has now decided to leave the company," says Leif Östling, President and CEO.

Lynn Basford Joins JMP

Lynn Basford, who specialises in sustainable transport and accessibility, has joined JMP Consulting's Central London office as a divisional director.

She had previously worked as a technical director at RPS for just over 12 months, following more than five years with TRL, where she was head of business development in the Transport Division.

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Due to expansion, *Coach and Bus Week* – the leading trade magazine for the coach and bus industries – is looking to recruit further freelance and full-time editorial staff.

We are looking for a number of freelance contributors, particularly experienced transport writers with a knowledge of the bus and coach worlds. As *CBW* expands over the coming months we will need a number of additional journalists to cover both general transport issues and more specialist areas. If you feel you would like to contribute to Britain's number one coach and bus title then please contact publisher Andy Sutcliffe at the e-mail address below.

In addition *CBW* is looking to recruit an office-based Editorial Assistant. The ideal candidate will have an interest in the transport area, strong journalistic skills, perhaps knowledge of page make-up processes and most importantly a desire to get involved in a hectic weekly magazine environment. The job may entail some travel so a clean driving licence would be an advantage.

If you feel you could contribute to *CBW*, please send a CV and covering letter, together with examples of your work if possible, to:
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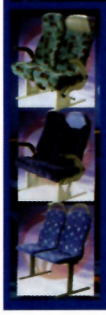

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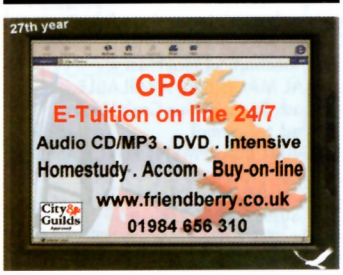

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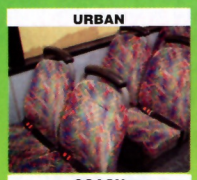

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Brought up from Down Under

Bus preservationsists. Bless 'em. Even my mate Nick Larkin, who never lets an opportunity pass to verbally molest TfL for coshing the Routemaster.

Word reaches me of enthusiasts for whom the expression 'die-hard' is an understatement. Discovering in their global perambulations a 1946 Albion CX19 Venturer in Woombye, in the outback of Queensland, the enthusiasts of the Scottish Vintage Bus Museum in Fife set about bringing it back home.

Built in Scotstoun, the double-deck had been exported to work in Sydney in 1947, and was such an object of desire, the museum's enthusiasts enlisted the combined forces (and presumably wallets) of Stagecoach, FirstGroup, Moseleys and Volvo Australia to get the 'basket case' shipped via Singapore, Yokohama, California, Panama, New York and Bristol, finally towing it to Lothalmond, Fife. You could claim a fair bit of BSOG for that trip.

It's expected to make its debut, restored, in August after a two-year project. Well done. But the editor says he still can't muster the enthusiasm to go and see it....

Bridging the gap bus style

A bridge (much) too far

And we complain about the state of Britain's roads. This hilarious picture shows what happens when you ignore the '2 tonne limit' sign on rural bridges.

True, it didn't help this driver in the Middle East that the bridge in question was made entirely of sand, but someone up there was smiling on him - if a little wryly - to ensure neither end of the coach plunged into the river.

The question is, what happened next?

Emergency registration

Winning this weeks's prize for the most moronic bus passenger is the man who dialled 999 in Avon and Somerset with the following emergency...

"Can you put me through to Southmead Police Station, please? I'm very angry..."

"But sir, you dialled 999. You need to tell me what the emergency is."

"There's no emergency except there are no buses in Crow Lane."

"Are you phoning 999 to report there are no buses in Crow Lane?"

"Exactly. Because the police are doing bugger all about this. All this aggro that's going on. I'm a visitor here."

To his or her credit, the telephonist gave him the number of South Mead Police Station where - we hope - he was suitably 'dealt with'.

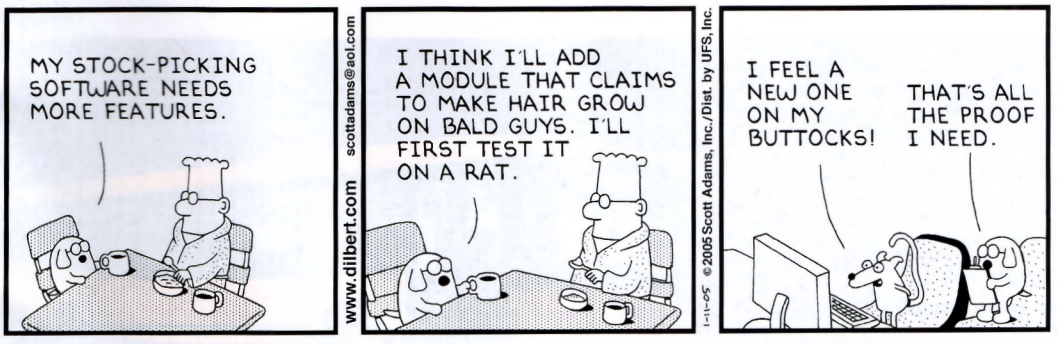
Two minute interview

Full name Paul Sawbridge
Age 53
Occupation Managing Director, Alfa Leisureplex Group
Will there be more passengers on coaches and buses? Only if we are relentless in our lobbying. Just because it is the logical solution does not guarantee it will be the one the public – or politicians – choose.
If yes, who will they be? If local authorities and PTEs get their act together to improve infrastructure, they could be all ages and social classes – in the big cities at least.
Which legislation has been the most irritating or useless? There is an "embarrassment of riches" from which to choose but the one which is currently pre-occupying me the most is next year's changes to Drivers' Hours rules. We are having to re-write all our itineraries to ensure our drivers' driving week is not reduced from its current average of 28 hours to 24 hours or less.
Give the industry's business managers 20 words of advice Your customers are always re-evaluating your price/performance mix, so make sure you do too.
When you got your first job in the industry, was it love at first sight? Absolutely not! I started as an assistant overseas holiday representative when I was 16 and never intended to return after university...
Which vehicle do you love the most and why? My 1968 Alfa Romeo Spyder because it is both beautiful and a delight to drive.
If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute? I have an awful tendency to lecture (on just about any subject!).

Googled...

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/oneminutemovies/watch/bus.shtml Bus stops aren't traditional fare for the movie maker, not least because they don't move. So the one-minute film 'The Bus Stop' you can download at the BBC website probably slightly stretches the viewer's attention span. It's art, apparently, so in the interests of broadening our artistic souls, we owe it a look. It only lasts a minute, after all. There's a bit of action near the middle of it...

Dilbert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